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Student Affairs development of a comprehensive approach to assessment includes consideration of learning outcomes, student needs and inputs, campus environments, student motivation, student uses and satisfaction, and cost effectiveness (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). This approach promotes a culture of evidence of student learning and development by conducting and using systematic research and assessment of Student Affairs programs and services at the Division level. We are driven by our desire to provide the very best educational experiences and opportunities for our students, and to this end we are accountable for quality of our programs and services. We support evidence-based decision-making within the Division. Moreover, we are transparent in our use of data and demonstrate responsibility in our reporting to stakeholders. Our Student Affairs Assessment Handbook provides a common language, structure, and transparency as we examine the unique ways in which we contribute to student learning and development.

**Principles of Good Practice for Assessment**

**Principle 1: Effective assessment begins with educational values.**

It is our mission, vision and values that drive what we do in practice. Assessment efforts begin with values that are then expressed through actions in the delivery of our programs and services. We use assessment as a tool to measure that which we value.

**Principle 2: Effective assessment reflects an understanding of organizational outcomes as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.**

Assessment is most effective when it is rooted and developed in the programs and services where measurable changes occur. It needs to include a variety of methods to accurately measure the complexity of the environments in which we work.

**Principle 3: Effective assessment only works well when there are clear and explicitly stated goals and objectives.**

Clearly articulated goals linked to mission, vision, and values are the foundation for effective assessment practice. From this foundation, we articulate measurable objectives that will inform our practice and our vision and values.

**Principle 4: Effective assessment addresses outcomes as well as the processes that lead to them.**

Assessing processes allows us to put findings from assessing outcomes into perspective. It allows us to know what worked in the delivery of programs and service, and under what conditions.

**Principle 5: Effective assessment is ongoing, systemic and systematic.**
Tracking progress of a program over time lends credibility to the results of program assessment. We focus on continuous improvement of our programs and services, and use previous assessment findings to inform our decision making. Many changes to student learning and development need to be tracked over time, and one-shot assessment would not accurately show the changes/impacts we would hope to see.

**Principle 6: Effective assessment is a collaborative process and needs to involve representatives from across student affairs and the institution.**

As our assessment efforts are tied to the University mission and vision, assessment practice in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs speak to fulfilling this vision. We all share a common framework for a comprehensive campus-wide assessment of student learning, development and satisfaction.

**Principle 7: Effective assessment must be linked to what people care about in order to be useful.**

For assessment information to be useful, it needs to be connected to the questions or issue we truly care about. We start with the end in mind, by deciding how we will use information. What questions do we need to ask to know if our program and services were successful in meeting our objectives?

**Principle 8: Effective assessment is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.**

Student Affairs greatest strength is in its contribution to the University vision. It is assessment evidence that lets us know we are on the correct path in our ongoing efforts to significantly contribute to student learning and the educational outcomes of our institution

**Principle 9: Effective assessment allows us to demonstrate our accountability and responsibility to student, the institution, and the public.**

Assessment is a means to an end. It gives us the information required to show what and how we are assisting with institutional effectiveness. By offering the best services and programs, we help students, the institution, and the public.

**Principle 10: Effective assessment is transparent.**

We provide evidence of an ongoing assessment process and that results are being used to inform our decision making. The assessment process is public and inclusive, which includes sharing results with our stakeholders and constituents.

**Principle 11: Effective assessment includes feedback.**

Systematic feedback allows the use of information to guide program development. What we learn about our programs and services through the assessment process is used to modify or eliminate what does not work. Feedback to participants and stakeholders communicates the value we place in the assessment process and the use of data for decision making.

(Principles 1-9 adapted from Upcraft, M.L., & Schuh, J.H., 1996, pp 22-24.)
Alignments

From the University-level down through each Student Affairs department, we rely on the previous level to help inform our practice, planning and implementation of programs and services. At each level, we have mission, vision, objectives and outcomes that inform our practice. We report the results of our measurable outcomes upward from the program level, where assessment occurs, to the University level. Results of our outcomes enlighten us on how well we are conducting our programs and, as a result, the impact we are making on student learning and development.

University
- University Mission, Themes, Learning Outcomes (LO), Planning and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Student Affairs (SA)
- Student Affairs Mission, Vision, Values, Themes
- General Statement of SA Contributions to the University Learning Outcomes
- SA Basics: Alignments, Units & Organizational Development Priorities, Finances, Leadership
- Overall SA Level KPI’s

Unit
- Alignment Area Description and Exec Summary
- Alignment Area Vision, Mission, Values
- Unit Level Mission, Vision, Values
- Unit Level Reports: KPI’s, Goals, Assessment Data, Learning Outcome Contributions, Projections

Department/Programs and Services
- Link to Unit Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives
- Department Objectives and Outcomes
**Assessment Cycle**

Assessment occurs at the department (or program-level) where the activity and service occurs. Student Affairs supports the following assessment cycle. This cycle is articulated in our assessment plans as well. This assessment cycle overlaps with the feedback process as well. At each stage in the process, information gleaned can be used to inform the next stage or a previous stage. Each step of the process should strive for transparency, this may include: publicly articulating the plan and intention, sharing results in a clear and meaningful way with all stakeholders, encouraging participants’ help in analyzing data, and sharing how conclusions impacted program development.
We may enter the assessment process at any place in this cycle. Assessment begins from where we currently operate, and it is from there that we start an assessment conversation to uncover the What, Who, How, When and Where of Effective Assessment Practice.

**Assessment Plans**

We should design with the end in mind! What do you want to see occur as a result of your program? Changes in student learning? Changes to program content or delivery? Changes in participation?
Assessment plans specify the steps taken to determine the effectiveness of programs and services. Our plans layout the steps we will take to gather evidence of student learning and development and of program functioning. In specifying our assessment plans, we make transparent our vision, desires, and expected outcomes as indicators of success. Assessment is continuous and systematic. Planning allows us to use results to modify, change or eliminate services that do not meet our needs and our expected outcomes, and allows us to use our resources more effectively.

**Clarify mission, values, goal/ objectives**

We cannot determine what to measure or what instrument to use until we clarify our mission, vision, values and objectives. These are at the heart of why programs and services exist.

**Mission:** It is the central purpose that provides focus, direction and destination for our work. It describes the purpose of our organization, who we serve, and our hopes. A clearly written, purposeful mission statement can serve as an excellent starting point for curriculum development, instruction and assessment. “Big picture of what we currently do” and why we exist.

- **Vision:** Central themes that best describe the future direction of our work. Visionary Themes are broader vision categories. It can be the case that a visionary theme might encompass more than one vision.

- **Values:** Those qualities and behaviors that are most highly regarded by members. It is your value/belief system.

**Goals** are very broad statements of what students should know or be able to do and/or what a program/service will accomplish. The purpose for crafting a set of goals, typically, is to give a brief and broad picture of what we expect our students to know and do, and what our program/services will accomplish.

These are general statements about what we need to accomplish to meet our mission and to serve our purpose. We typically set goals for 1-year in advance but we can set them for a much longer term. For example, in our annual reports we report on our progress in meeting our prior year's goals. While in strategic planning, we set goals for up to five-years out. Within any year, we may elect to re-prioritize our goals and/or to re-prioritize our activities towards meeting a goal. **Priorities are** essentially a reordering of goals and/or a reordering of activities to reach a goal.

**Objectives** are concrete ways that we will meet our goals though our program processes and student learning and development. They may at times be very similar to goals or be more specific. They will describe what the program will do or what the student is to do.
For PSU Student Affairs annual report, we will report on our goals and our outcomes. We will set goals for the coming year, and then report on how we met our goals through our outcomes. For our reporting purposes, goals and objectives will be the same thing.

- **Examples of student learning objectives:**
  - Engage students in learning
  - Promote students’ academic success
  - Foster students’ personal and intellectual growth
  - Foster student leadership skills
  - Foster collaboration

- **Examples of program objectives:**
  - Increase volunteerism
  - Increase diversity
  - Increase accessibility of volunteer opportunities
  - Increase awareness of WRC programs
  - Increase private scholarships and remission rewards for PSU students.

It is essential that we begin the assessment process by articulating and clarifying our mission, vision, and objectives. The development of objectives, determination of assessment tools, and analysis is not possible until this articulation and clarification process has occurred.

**Create measurable program and learning outcomes**

**Outcomes** are specific statements derived from objectives in language that makes objectives measurable. Outcomes are what we will assess. **Outcomes** essentially take an objective and bound it to a place, time, group of participants, and a level for performance. Outcomes are specifically about what you want the **end result of your efforts** to be, the changes you want to occur. Learning outcomes are changes in students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that result from involvement in a program or activity. It describes what you want the student to know and do. Outcomes are statements of what you will assess.

- **Learning outcomes** are changes in students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that result from the experience. *It is not what you* are going to do to the student, but rather it describes what you want the student to do.
- **Program outcomes**, on the other hand, are the changes you want to see in programs and services.

Remember: An outcome must be measurable, meaningful and manageable. It must specify a target audience. It must provide you with evidence you need.

Once our outcomes are determined, we then articulate the standard for performance or success. We do this for both program and learning outcomes. How does one know where to set the bar for success? We can set performance levels using various sources: 1) past performance on the same outcomes (e.g.,
student performance on an inventory from the previous year); 2) benchmark data; 3) review of the literature; and 4) pilot-testing a measure.

An outcome consists of three components:

- **Audience (A)** Person doing or program expressing
- **Behavior (B)** What person will do or report or what program will do or report
- **Condition (C)** for Success

Examples of learning outcomes include:

- (Students) (will be able to recall) at least (5 of the 7 elements of the Social Change Model).
- (Students) (will demonstrate increased leadership skills) by (successfully completing a leadership skills inventory, as indicated by a score of at least 80% correct).

Examples of program outcomes include:

- (The XXX program) will (increase awareness of its programs/services) (by 20%).
- (The XXX program) will (increase the diversity of its volunteers) (to reflect the diversity of the PSU).

**Determine measures**

Now that the objectives are specified, you can determine how you will measure your outcomes. Depending on wording of your outcomes, you may elect to use qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed methods data collection. You may decide to use existing data, rather than collect new data. You will need to decide if your outcomes require direct or indirect evidence, or formative or summative information.

**Quantitative, Qualitative, or Mixed Methods**

Quantitative data collection has these characteristics:

- involves the use of predetermined instruments where numeric data is collected
- typically measures a large number of individuals
- involves statistical analysis, description of trends, comparison of groups, relationships among variables, a comparison of results with predictions and past studies.

Qualitative data collection has these characteristics:

- involves open-ended questions, observations/field research, interviews, document analysis, audiovisual materials
- typically a small number of individuals
- involves text analysis, description, analysis, and thematic development, searching for larger meaning
Mixed methods: allow for both breadth and depth in participant responding.

**Are there existing data that can be used or must new data be collected?**

- Alumni, employer, student surveys
- Exit Interviews with graduates
- Graduate follow-up studies
- Percentage of students who go on graduate school
- Retention and transfer studies
- Job placement statistics
- Activities selected or elected by students
- Faculty/student ratios
- Percentage of students who study abroad
- Enrollment trends
- Percentage of students who graduate within five-six years
- Diversity of student body

**Do we want to collect direct or indirect evidence?**

Direct methods of collecting information require the students to display their knowledge and skills.

- Direct measures of learning are usually accomplished through assessment methods such as “quiz” type survey, rubric, document analysis, observation, portfolio, visual methods, one-minute assessment, and/or case study
- Example: Where on campus would you go, or who would you consult with if you had questions about which courses to register for in the fall?

Indirect methods require that students or someone else to reflect student learning, behavior, attitudes rather than to demonstrate it.

- Indirect measures of learning are usually accomplished through assessment methods such as survey, focus group, document analysis, and/or one-minute assessment.
- Example: I know where to go on campus if I have questions about which courses to register for in the fall. (Strongly agree, Moderately agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Moderately disagree, Strongly disagree)

**What type of assessment do you plan to conduct?**

- Usage Numbers - track participation in programs or services
  - Consider the following methods: existing data, tracking system, calendar system, KPI
- Student Needs - keeps you aware of student body or specific populations
  - Consider the following methods: survey, focus group, visual methods
- Program Effectiveness - level of satisfaction, involvement, effectiveness, helpfulness, etc.
  - Consider the following methods: survey, focus group, observation
- Cost Effectiveness - how does a program/service being offered compare with cost?
  - Consider the following methods: existing data, comparative data, KPI
- Campus Climate or Environment - assess the behaviors/attitudes on campus
Consider the following methods: focus group, document analysis, survey, existing data, case study, observation

- Comparative (Benchmarking) - comparing a program/service against a comparison group
  - Consider the following methods: survey, rubric, existing data, KPI
- Using National Standards or Norms (i.e., CAS) - Comparing a program/service with a set of pre-established standards (e.g., CAS, Information Literacy) or normative data (e.g., ACT scores)
  - Consider the following methods: survey, document analysis, existing data
- Learning Outcomes – assess how a participant will think, feel, or act differently as a result of your program/course/service
  - Overall, your assessment method should be a reflection of the learning that you are seeking to assess. Thinking about Bloom’s taxonomy, the different levels of thinking would require different assessment methods. In other words, a more in-depth thinking level would necessitate more in-depth assessment.
  - For example, an assessment of the synthesis and evaluation levels would be more in-depth and require more complex assessment methods such as rubrics, content analysis or interviews/focus groups, compared to knowledge or comprehension levels that are less complex and can be assessed using surveys and quizzes
  - Consider the following methods: survey/quiz, rubric, portfolio, one-minute assessment

Regardless of method of data collection, you want to make sure that the method...

Is linked to values

- Use methods that will allow you to measure outcomes that are tied to mission, goals, and objectives
- Use methods that take into account any professional standards.

Measures expectations

- What students need to Know, Do, or Report to demonstrate your intended outcomes
- What the program will do to ensure what students will be able to do and to know. Process first, outcomes second.
- At a specified level, rather than just being satisfied.

Answers important questions

- Collect data you believe will be useful to answering the important questions you have raised.
- Organize reports around issues, not solely data.

Uses reliable and valid measurement

- Provides accurate information (e.g., primary vs. secondary source; accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness) measuring outcomes and appear credible to others.
- Will provide consistent (reliable) information
- Will ensure compliance to the methods (e.g., will participants fill out questionnaires carefully, engage interviews or focus groups, let you examine their documentations)
- Provides enough diversity of information (triangulation, subgroups) to makes decisions about program and participants.
- Respects human rights/ethics (confidentiality & anonymity, do no harm, appropriate use of data for intended and not unintended purposes)
Creates data/information that informs

- Stakeholders and decision making
- Pedagogy, budgeting, planning, decision making, or policies
- Considers who needs to make decisions with this data? And the kinds of evidence help me make the decisions I need to make?
- Considers how information will be reported to convey main points and inform

Considers available resources

- Collected and analyzed in low-cost and practical manner (e.g., using questionnaires, surveys and checklists?)
- Uses what time and resources are available
- Stays in budget and timeline
- Considers analysis and interpretation capabilities
- Fits into annual responsibilities?
- Who needs to see this data?
- How easily can it fit this method into my annual responsibilities?
- Who needs to make decisions with this data?
- Will this kind of evidence help me make the decisions I need to make?

Implement program and data collection

How successful is your program in meeting its objectives? How successful are students in your program? To ensure that data are of the highest quality (both reliable and valid), we need to ensure that are programs are successfully implemented. In advance, identify who is responsible for implementation, determine who will do the assessment and how data will be collected, and determine the timeframe for activities and assessment. Remember that not all objectives are realized in the same timeframe. It may be the case that you elect to measure objectives over time.

In addition, select the sample (or population) that will be assessed and any relevant comparison group(s). Also determine how you will administer instruments (face-to-face, online, mail).

Assess outcomes during and after the delivery

Often we need to know about the process as well as the product. This speaks to two forms of assessment: formative and summative. Formative Assessment or evaluation is done during a program or service to provide information useful in improving learning or teaching while it is still occurring. Summative Assessment or evaluation, on the other hand, is conducted at the end of a program, service, or experience to make determinations of quality, worth, and meeting targeted outcomes. An example is a final grade at the end of a course.

Analyze, interpret, report and use results
Now this is the fun part, making sense of your data and using it to inform both your practice and decision making. Data analyses are directly tied to the methods selected. For example, analyzing quantitative data one can report descriptive statistics such as central tendency (mean, median and mode) and dispersion (spread or variation around measures of central tendency). You can also perform analyses on quantitative data, dependent upon its level of measurement e.g., nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio, to examine relationships between variables, to examine mean difference between two or more groups, and for prediction. In analyzing qualitative data, we do so with an eye for looking at patterns and themes, and finding information that either confirms or disconfirms previous understandings.

Here are some straightforward ways to examine your quantitative data:

1. Look at characteristics of your respondents. What can you learn about your respondents that will help you to better understand your data? For example, do student responses vary by age, year in school, cumulative GPA, to name a few? Also do responders look like the population from which they were drawn (i.e., do responders possess the same characteristics of interest). Having a high response rate does not guarantee that your responders are representative and that your results will generalize.
2. Report frequencies of each response.
3. Report the mean, median or mode. The mean is reserved for data that is at the interval- or ration-level only. For Nominal or categorical data, only report the mode. For ordinal level data report the median value. Each of these has its own measure of dispersion that is appropriate as well. Talk to the Assessment Coordinator for assistance.

Note: all surveys administered in Student Voice are also analyzed in this program with the help of SV assessment professionals.

Here are some straightforward ways to examine your qualitative data:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.
2. Read through all the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process. Coding is the process of taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling these categories with a term, often a term based on the actual language of the participant.
4. Use the codes to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, place, or events in a setting. Researchers can generate codes for this description.
5. Advance how the descriptions and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.
6. Evaluate the lessons learned from the data and make interpretations (or meaning) of data.

Transparency and reporting

Transparency is making meaningful, understandable information about student learning and institutional performance (assessment) readily available to stakeholders. Information is meaningful and
understandable when it is contextualized and tied to institutional goals for student learning (National Institute for Learning Outcome Assessment).

Practicing transparent assessment motivates us to be ethical, to improve our writing and presentation, and to draw conclusions that are well-supported and clearly-reasoned. Transparency also allows students and other stakeholders to engage in the assessment cycle. Each step of the process should strive for transparency, this may include: publicly sharing the assessment plan, publicly sharing results, encouraging participants’ help in analyzing data, and sharing how conclusions impacted program development.

You may also want to consider:

- Highlighting assessment results in your annual report (Briefing Book)
- Engaging participants or stakeholders in analyzing data.
- Sharing conclusions with a board or committee members.
- Making reports available on department website.
- Sharing survey results on Student Voice.
- Writing an article.
- Presenting results/process at a conference.
- Sending a press release to student media.

A basic report on an assessment should include your mission, alignments to University and Student Affairs themes, goals, outcomes, and use of data.

Using data

- How do your results provide evidence for your outcomes?
- What do your results say about your program process and the impact of the program on students’ learning and development?
- Based on the results, what decisions will you make or what action will you take regarding programs, policies, and services as well as improvements/refinements to the assessment process.
- Plan to summarize and disseminate information to fit the needs of various stakeholders. This also includes sharing information on websites, in briefings, in marketing, and includes soliciting feedback where appropriate.

Feedback loops

Information from your data analysis and interpretation should be fed back into the assessment cycle at various points along the way. For example, if your results indicated that your assessment measure needed to be revised, then you would not need to revisit the stage of mission, values, and objectives clarification.

- Based on the results, what decisions will you make or what action will you take regarding programs, policies, and services as well as improvements/refinements to the assessment process. Make sure to assess the effectiveness of these decisions or actions.
● If results were as you hoped, then note this as well.
● If results did not meet expectations: are outcomes well-matched to the program? Are measures aligned with the outcomes? Do changes or improvements need to be made to the program in order to reach the goals of the program? Is there differential performance?

References