ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR
NON-INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Setting goals for their departments or programs is not a new idea to managers and supervisors; it is an integral part of planning and directing the work flow of a program or department. Assessing a student's knowledge about services received or processes learned, on the other hand, may be a new concept.

The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment mandate focuses all of us on the strong links between statements of goals (SLOs) and their assessment. Here is a concise definition of assessment that explains those connections:

> Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high 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. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (Thomas A. Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p. 7).

The WASC accreditation standard for student learning outcomes does not micromanage the assessment process. Instead, it leaves to managers and supervisors the decisions that will determine how useful the assessment process will be in improving teaching and learning. In other words, managers and supervisors decide how they will assess the student learning outcomes.

Any tool that measures the degree to which students have met a learning outcome qualifies as assessment. Such tools include surveys and pre- and post-tests. Most outcomes can be measured in a variety of ways.

Some of the principles of assessment to keep in mind when developing an assessment plan include:

- Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.
- Assessment is based on measurable criteria.
- Assessment is accomplished with a variety of methods.
- Assessment involves processes as well as outcomes.
- Assessment improves teaching and learning.
- Assessment informs planning and decision-making.

Some questions to ask:

- *What assessment instruments and methods may be used in the department or service unit?*
- *Will they provide useful information?*
- *What purpose will the assessments serve?*
- *How will the assessment results be used?*
- *Will the data collected from the assessment inform the unit's decision-making?*

Criteria for selection of assessment methods and implementation:

- The learning outcomes selected for assessment are important.
- The assessment methods measure student achievement.
- The assessment methods are varied.
- The criteria for determining success is established.
- The time frame for assessing student learning is doable.
- The time and person responsible for the administration of the assessment is clear.
- The time and person(s) responsible to collect and analyze the data is clear.

Here are some steps that will help you develop an assessment plan:

First, check your SLOs:

o *How many are there?* If there are more than three, they likely aren't true SLOs – they may be objectives that were just moved into the SLO area. You should revise them into SLOs before creating an assessment plan.

o *Are the SLOs overarching ("big picture" learning for the department or program) or are they smaller objectives (things leaned in just one interaction with the department, for instance)?* If they are not overarching, you should revise the SLOs before creating an assessment plan.

o *Is the student learning described in the SLO observable and measurable?* If not, you should revise the SLOs to make them observable and measureable before creating an assessment plan.

Next, decide on an appropriate assessment tool. Consider:

- *What is the SLO asking the students to do?*
  o Identify a fact?
  o Perform a skill?
  o Analyze a complex phenomenon?
  o Solve a problem?
  o Explain a concept?
  o Apply skills or knowledge to real-world situations?
  o Evaluate options and select appropriate resources or tools?

- *What types of activities will allow students to demonstrate the SLO (see Appendix A for more infor-*mation about choosing an assessment tool)?
  o Pre- and post-tests
  o Skill demonstrations?
  o Surveys?

- *What criteria will you use to measure success or failure to meet the SLO?*
  o Rubric?
  o Raw score

Then, decide how and when you will do the assessment:

- *How often will you assess?*
  o Will it be on a semester cycle? An annual cycle? Other?
  o Are there similar services that could be grouped together?
  o Which semester will you begin assessing this service?
  o If you make changes, when will you reassess to see the effects?

- *Will you assess all students or will you use sampling?*
  o If you are sampling, how many students will be involved?
  o How will you decide which students to involve?

- *What do you need to do to prepare?*
  o Do you need to set up meetings with staff?
  o Do you need to create a test or rubric?
  o How will you distribute materials?
  o Do you need any additional resources or training?

Finally, think about how and when you will share the assessment results and use the results in decision-making about the service and/or program ("closing the loop"):

- *What needs to be done to gather and present the data?*
  o Do you need data from Institutional Research?
  o What format will you use to share the data? PowerPoint? Handouts? Other?

- *When will be a meaningful time for your department to reflect on the results?*
  o Department retreats?
  o Department meetings?
  o Other?

- *What changes might be made to the service or program based on the results?*
  o Changes to the assessment tool or method?
  o Changes to the service, program or department?
  o Changes to the service delivery methods?
  o Changes to student resources or services?

- *How will these results inform other decisions for the department or program?*
  o How do the results of this assessment fit into the larger picture of the program or department?
  o Is there a need for professional development on specific topics?
  o Should budgeting priorities change?
  o hould staffing or other resources be adjusted?
  o Other

Types of Data

Quantitative (numeric scores) and Qualitative (narratives, observations, interviews)

Types of Assessment		
	Types	*Examples*
Performance	Use of tools/technology Interview Role-play	Tutorial Peer review Demonstration
Portfolio	Student portfolio Self-assessment	Journal
Production	Essay Oral presentation	Visual Speech
Survey	Focus group Survey of student satisfaction Survey of student services accessed Questionnaire	
Quiz	Informal evaluation	
Test	Placement test Diagnostic	Pre-test

Assessing a Student Learning Outcome (Template)

Learning Outcome
Assessment method
Describe the tool or strategy
When will you assess and how often?
Resources needed (staff, equipment, materials)
What are the criteria for success?