

Assessment Basics

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The Fundamental Assessment Questions

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How do we evaluate our progress?
- How effective/successful are we in our efforts?
- How are we using this knowledge to improve what we do?

Levels of Assessment

- Institution/Campus
Example: What are the University's primary goals, how do we evaluate our progress, how successful are we in these efforts at present, and how are we using information from assessment to refine our approaches and strategies?
- General Education
Example: What are the educational/learning goals of our distribution/core requirements, how do we evaluate our progress in achieving these learning goals, how successful are we, how are we improving our approaches based on the results of our evaluations?
- Department
Example: What are our primary goals (organizational, educational, research, service), how do we evaluate our success and progress in meeting these goals, how successful are we in these efforts at present, how are we using information from assessment to refine our approaches and strategies?
- Program or Service (academic, student life, administrative, or service)
Example: What are the goals of our program or service, how do we evaluate our success in achieving these goals, how successful are we, how are we improving our approaches based on our evaluations?

What This Means in Practice

- Making implicit goals and criteria explicit
- Discussing, documenting, clarifying, and communicating goals, methods of evaluation, and outcomes
- Applying our research models and expertise to a review of our own institutional, departmental, and educational practices
- Developing a culture of review, evidence, and continuing improvement

Reasons Why We Wouldn't Want to Do This

- We already do this in our own, personalized way
- It takes time; there's already too much to do

- It's a business model
- It's not immediately obvious how this will lead to increased quality
- It is impossible to precisely determine effectiveness or success
- We are concerned that this is a step toward external control and regulation

Why Assessment Makes Sense (In Spite of the Foregoing)

- Allows us to better communicate our purposes and values
- Addresses public perceptions that higher education is arrogant, detached, and not willing to be accountable. Debating, defending, denial simply confirms these perceptions
- Creates shared perspectives and language
- Responds to growing state and national pressure for accountability and transparency (e.g., State government and The Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education)
- Offers a proactive strategy, allowing us to exercise control (our goals, assessment criteria, and methods; not those developed or imposed by others)
- Utilizes the expertise and resources of the research university to evaluate our own organizations and operations
- Accreditation requires it
- Useful for our own review and improvement processes
 - Fosters constructive dialogue
 - Clarifies purposes and goals
 - Helps determine/document progress toward aspirations
 - Applies the expertise of the research university to improve the institution

Middle States Commission on Higher Education Accrediting Approach to Assessment

- Assessment is an implicit theme in all of the 14 Middle States standards
- Two standards focus explicitly on assessment — No. 7 (Institutional Assessment) and No.14 (Learning Outcomes Assessment)

Middle States Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in:

- Achieving its mission and goals;
- Implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes;
- Using institutional resources efficiently;
- Providing leadership and governance;
- Providing administrative structures and services;
- Demonstrating institutional integrity; and
- Assuring that institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its students and graduates.

Middle States Standard 14: Learning Outcomes Assessment

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have:

- Knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals, and that
- Students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

Basic Questions for Learning Outcomes Assessment

- What are we trying to accomplish through our program courses and the other learning and living experiences we provide? (What does it mean to have a Rutgers degree, or be a Philosophy or Physics graduate?)
- What should students who graduate from our institution/department/program know and be able to do?
- How do we determine if we are successful?
- What do the results show?
- How do we use the information for improvement?

Types of Measures

- Direct ("Best")
- Indirect ("Good, but not ideal")
- Inferential ("Of limited value")

Direct Measures of Learning

- Entrance (pre) and exit (post) tests (institution, program or course-specific)
- Placement tests
- Systematic evaluation of student portfolios
- Capstone experiences or senior projects (with assessment by multiple reviewers)
- Standardized tests and internally/externally-designed comprehensive (written and oral) exit tests and examinations
- Senior thesis (with assessment by multiple reviewers)
- Oral defense of senior thesis or project (with assessment by multiple reviewers)
- Required oral presentations (with assessment by multiple raters)
- Performance on licensure, certification, or professional exams
- Systematic evaluation of required papers, research projects, or essay questions (with assessment by multiple reviewers)
- External evaluation of internship performance, exhibits, or performances

Indirect Measures of Learning

- Exit interviews or focus groups of graduates
- Surveys of alumni, employers, and students
- Retention, persistence, graduation, and transfer rates and studies
- Length of time to degree (years/hours to completion)
- Grade distributions
- SAT scores
- Course enrollments and profile
- Job placement data

Other Indicators that Provide Less Direct, but Still Potentially Useful Measures of Learning

- Questionnaires asking students if their personal goals for course, major, or program have been met
- Instruments that collect data on indirect facts that can affect student success such as curriculum review reports or evaluation reports of program submitted by visiting committees of external peer experts (accreditation reports)
- Faculty publications and recognition
- Courses selected by majors, grades, and GPAs
- Faculty-student ratio
- Percentage of students who study abroad
- Enrollment trends
- Student diversity

How to Proceed

- Discuss, articulate and document goals
- Identify existing methods and information useful for determining/documenting effectiveness/success
- Develop a plan to evaluate areas where assessment approaches and data do not currently exist

References and Readings

American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Association of American Universities (AAU), National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). (2006). *Addressing the Challenges Facing American Undergraduate Education*, September 21, 2006.

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Campus Resources

Center Advancement of Teaching (CAT) supports teaching and learning through workshops and consulting on pedagogy, faculty development techniques, such as teaching portfolios, and also on assessment programs, and instructional and classroom technologies. CAT also offers assistance to departments as they formalize an assessment plan. See <http://cat.rutgers.edu/MiddleStates>. Contact CAT at curiosity@cat.rutgers.edu, Monica Devanas (devanas@cat.rutgers.edu) or Gary Gigliotti (gag@cat.rutgers.edu).

Center for Organizational Development and Leadership (ODL) offers consulting services and workshops to assist academic, administrative, and service departments in organizational assessment, goal clarification, measures and effectiveness evaluation of their core programs and services (including focus groups and web-based surveys), and in using results in strategic planning. See a description of ODL programs, services, and publications at <http://www.odl.rutgers.edu/> or contact: Sherrie Tromp (tromp@odl.rutgers.edu) or Brent Ruben (ruben.odl.rutgers.edu).

The Graduate School-New Brunswick collects both local and national comparative data on many aspects of doctoral education, including time-to-degree, completion rates, and placement. In cooperation with Institutional Research it conducts exit surveys of doctoral students that ask a very broad range of questions about students' experiences and levels of satisfaction. It is the office that coordinates surveys and data collection efforts regarding graduate education for several national associations. It conducts reviews with individual degree program directors of current programs, using the collected data and surveys as a starting point for discussions of student success, effectiveness of programs, curricula and funding. It also provides assistance to graduate degree programs and authors of training grant proposals in providing assessment data for their use. Contact: Harvey Waterman (waterman@rutgers.edu) or David S. Pickens (dsp@rutgers.edu).

The Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (OIRAP) provides assessment, benchmarking, planning, and public information services to support institutional effectiveness and to respond to the needs of the university community and the citizens of New Jersey. OIRAP maintains a data warehouse of information from a variety of sources including the Student Records Database (SRDB), Human Resources, Course Scheduling, the Course Analysis, student financial aid and placement, and the Faculty Survey as well as national data sources such as IPEDS and NSF. Information on the new academic program application process, the Accountability and Excellence Report, and summaries of the entering and graduating student surveys can be found at www.oirap.rutgers.edu. Contact: Rob Heffernan (heffernan@instlres.rutgers.edu).

Gerry Warshaver, Director of Special Projects in the Office of Academic Affairs serves as staff to the Executive Committee and Steering Committee of the Rutgers 2008 Middle States Reaccreditation Review and as its liaison to senior administration. His role in the reaccreditation process also involves him in the coordination of documentation and information required for the university's self-study. See Florida Atlantic University and North Carolina State links in *References and Readings* for special reference to the Middle States review and assessment. Contact: Gerry Warshaver (warshaver@oldqueens.rutgers.edu).