

Getting Started on Assessment

Assessment of student learning includes course-level assessment and program-level assessment. Many programs will designate a specific grade-point-average as the minimum requirement for graduating from a program, but it provides little information on what students learned during their course of study.

Typically, the course syllabus outlines the requirements for achieving a certain grade for the course. The grade serves as a composite of students' performance in the course but does not provide information about what was learned and does not indicate how to enhance student learning.

Assessment of programs is similar to assessment of courses in that both have a set of learning objectives or outcomes. Catalogs and other department documents will often contain statements such as, "Students who graduate from this program will...", followed by a list of the things students will learn or be able to do upon successfully completing the program.

To facilitate an understanding of what students have learned, program assessment involves evidence of student learning for each of the objectives of the program. To begin the process, faculty in the program should clarify the knowledge, skills and abilities students should be capable of demonstrating upon completion of the required courses. Questions to help with that process include:

1. What will our students learn in our program?
2. What are our expectations?
3. How would we describe our students if they have learned what we want them to learn?
4. What should our students be able to demonstrate?

The answers to these questions form the basis for learning goals and learning objectives. After the learning goals and objectives are generated, the following steps include:

- Mapping the courses with the skills identified in the learning outcomes in an alignment matrix.
- Creating an assessment plan, with identified student tasks to assess, the point in the curriculum where assessment can occur, and assessment measures.
- Developing an implementation plan, including persons responsible, timelines and provisions for data storage.