The Trusted Expert and Internationally Recognized Leader for all Postsecondary Student Transitions
Building Blocks for an Effective First-Year Assessment Plan

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How Assessment Can Feel...
How We Want You to Feel...
Caveat
INTRODUCTION
Are you a “Faith-Based” Institution?

“Estimates of college quality are essentially ‘faith-based,’ insofar as we have little direct evidence of how any given school contributes to students’ learning.” RICHARD HERSCH (2005). ATLANTIC MONTHLY
What is Assessment?

• “The **systematic** collection, review & use of information about educational programs for the purposes of **improving student learning and development**.”

• “Any effort to **gather, analyze, and interpret evidence**, which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness.”

• “The process of **gathering & discussing information** from multiple & diverse sources in order to develop a deeper understanding of what students know, understand, & can do.”
What is Assessment?

• Effectiveness includes:
  – Student learning outcomes
  – Client satisfaction
  – Compliance with professional standards
  – Comparisons with other institutions

• Successful assessment **creates action**, in order to:
  – Guide good practice
  – Initiate change or improvement

• Critical part of strategic planning

• “Evidence of an intentional, comprehensive approach to improving the first year that is appropriate to an institution’s type and mission.”

• “Evidence of assessment of the various initiatives that constitute this approach.”

• “Broad impact on significant numbers of first-year students, including, but not limited to special student subpopulations.”

• “Strong administrative support for first-year initiatives, evidence of institutionalization, and durability over time.”

• “Involvement of a wide range of faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, and other constituent groups.”
Systematic Cycle of Assessment

1. Identify learning outcomes
2. Document what you already know
3. Identify appropriate methods of measurement
4. Gather evidence
5. Interpret evidence
6. Disseminate results
7. Implement change
Why is assessment so hard?
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- Lack of support from leadership
- Lack of expertise
- Not enough resources
  - Human: staff support
  - Fiscal: $$$
- Fear of results
- Political landscape
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What are some of the barriers unique to FYS assessment?
Why is assessment so hard?

- Lack of support from leadership
- Lack of expertise
- Not enough resources
  - Human: staff support
  - Fiscal: $$$
- Fear of results
- Political landscape
- Retention focused
- Overreliance on anecdotal evidence
- No common outcomes
- Time for transition
- Tracking of students
- Learning is subjective
- Others?
Section 1: What do you want to know?

- Identify learning outcomes
- Document what you already know
- Identify appropriate methods of measurement
- Gather evidence
- Interpret evidence
- Disseminate results
- Implement change
Characteristics of Outcomes

• Express what the student will be able to know or do
• Focuses on product rather than process
• Must be **MEASURABLE**
• Detailed and specific
• Include action verbs
• Appropriate
• Manageable
• Meaningful
• Balance achievable with aspirational
Toward a Definition of Outcomes

• Astin (1993):
  – Student outcomes refer to those aspects of the student’s development that the institution either does to influence or attempts to influence through its educational programs and practices

• Bresciani (2006):
  – What the program intends to accomplish in regard to its services, research, student learning, and faculty/staff development
Program Outcomes: Criteria for HIPs “Excellence”

• Creates an investment of time and energy
• Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
• Real-world applications
• High expectations
• Includes frequent feedback
• Exposure to diverse perspectives
• Demands reflection and integrated learning
• Public displays of accountability
Student Outcomes: Domains for FYS Outcomes

- Retention
- Academic skills/experiences
- Campus connection
- Interpersonal skills
- Personal development
- Employability
- Civic engagement/democratic citizenship
Examples of FYS Outcomes

• **Retention**
  – Persistence to the 2nd year
  – Graduation rates

• **Academic skills/experiences**
  – Analytical & critical thinking skills
  – Development of educational career goals
  – Declaring a major
  – Knowledge integration & application
  – Academic engagement
  – Academic achievement
  – Cognitive complexity
  – Study skills
  – Introduction to a discipline

• **Campus connection**
  – Knowledge of university requirements
  – Ability to identify, seek, & use organizational resources
  – Connection to campus community
  – Understanding history & traditions
  – Involvement in cocurricular activities
  – Satisfaction with student experience

• **Interpersonal skills**
  – Conflict resolution
  – Written & oral communication
  – Development of a social support network
  – Multicultural competence
Examples of FYS Outcomes

• **Personal development**
  - Time management
  - Identity exploration & development
  - Values clarification
  - Practical competence
  - Life management skills
  - Physical health
  - Emotional wellness
  - Moral and ethical development
  - Leadership skills

• **Civic engagement/democratic citizenship**
  - Participation in service
  - Engagement in philanthropy
  - Political awareness/engagement
  - Political activism/social advocacy
  - Community involvement

• **Employability**
  - Analyzing a problem from various sources
  - Innovation and creation of new knowledge
  - Providing direction through interpersonal persuasion
  - Ability to integrate ideas and information
  - Applying knowledge to a real-world setting
  - Ability to coach and mentor others
  - Project planning and management
  - Engage in continuous learning
  - Desirability as a candidate
  - Initiative
  - Ethical decision-making
  - Professionalism
  - Ability to build a team

• **Others?**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FYS Objective (n=372)</strong></th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic success strategies</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with the institution or campus</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the institution resources/services</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical, critical thinking, or problem-solving skills</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to college-level academic expectations</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic planning or major exploration</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal exploration or development</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common first-year experience</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-faculty interaction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing skills</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention or second-year return rates</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Format of a Learning Outcome

Subject → Verb → Object

Learning Outcome
Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – Verb – Object

• The subject of the outcome is the thing that is performing the action
• In the case of student learning outcomes, the subject is going to be students, either generally or a specific subset (e.g. peer leaders, learning community participants)
Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – Verb – Object

• The Verb of the outcome describes the cognitive process or how the student will demonstrate learning

• Verbs are important because they will often determine the type and depth of learning which will have an influence on how the outcome is measured.
A Revised Taxonomy

Benjamin Bloom (1956)
- *A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*
- Emphasized cognitive aspects of learning
- Widely used in educational circles

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)
- Emphasized cognitive processes of learning and added a knowledge domain
- Easily adaptable to many disciplines including higher education
## Levels of Cognitive Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Cognitive Process</th>
<th>Action Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering: Can the student recall or remember the information?</td>
<td>Define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding: Can the student explain the ideas or concepts?</td>
<td>Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying: Can the student use the information in a new way?</td>
<td>Choose, dramatize, demonstrate, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing: Can the student distinguish between the different parts?</td>
<td>Appraise, argue, compare, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating: Can the student justify a position or decision?</td>
<td>Appraise, argue, judge, defend, select, support, value, evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating: Can the student create a new product or point of view?</td>
<td>Assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – Verb – **Object**

- The Object of the learning outcome refers to the kind of knowledge you would like students to achieve.
  - Factual knowledge
  - Conceptual knowledge
  - Procedural knowledge
  - Metacognitive knowledge
Steps to Creating a Learning Outcome

1. Determine the purpose of the program, course, event, or initiative
2. Reflect on your target population and your venue
3. Decide what kind of knowledge you want the student to gain
4. Decide on the level of cognitive process
5. Write the outcome, with subject, object, and verb
6. Evaluate the outcome:
   • Is it measureable?
   • Is it meaningful?
   • Is it manageable?
Let’s Practice!

• What do you want students to learn or do as a result of participating in your FYS?
• What action do you want students to take as a result of participating in your FYS (e.g., remembering, synthesizing, creating, etc.)?
• Write several learning outcomes related to your FYS.
• For each outcome, reflect on how this statement is manageable, meaningful, and measurable.
Section 2: What do you already know?

- Identify learning outcomes
- Identify appropriate methods of measurement
- Gather evidence
- Interpret evidence
- Disseminate results
- Implement change
- Document what you already know
Data Audit

• Examine existing data sources
  – Identify data sources (“What do you already have?”)
  – Organize them into a usable information system (“How can you use it?”)

• Determining what additional data are needed for evaluation, assessment, and decision-making
Document What You Already Know

• What data do you already have?
  – Who is collecting it?
  – Where is it being housed?
  – Are there plans for future data collection?

• Are these data currently being used?
  – If so, how are these results communicated?
  – If not, why not?

• How can you use data that has already been collected for your assessment needs?

“Data lust turns into data dust”
Other Data Audit Considerations

• Takes time!
• Is a political enterprise (Be prepared!)
• Should involve a team
• Best when grounded in an outcome or organizing framework
• Is a bit of a moving target
• You do not have to use all the data
• Contextual
Take one minute to list as many potential sources of data for first-year students and seminars on your campus as possible. Remember your outcomes!
Section 3: Which assessment models?

1. Identify appropriate methods of measurement
2. Identify learning outcomes
3. Gather evidence
4. Interpret evidence, Disseminate results
5. Document what you already know
6. Implement change
Types of Assessment

- **Summative** – used to make a judgment about the efficacy of a program

- **Formative** – used to provide feedback in order to foster improvement.
FYE Assessment Strategy: Value Added

• Collects multiple kinds of data on the same cohort and controls for certain characteristics to approximate impact

• Answers: “Are our students improving, developing, and learning?”

• Longitudinal data
  – Accounts for time
  – Explores change
  – Requires tracking
Assessment Strategies: Astin’s I-E-O Model
An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Environment Only Assessment
An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Outcome Only Assessment

INPUTS

ENVIRONMENTS

O

OUTCOMES
An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Environment-Outcomes Assessment
Identify appropriate “I”s and “E”s for one of your outcomes of interest in FYE assessment
Assessment Strategies: Astin’s I-E-O Model

Inputs:

Environments:

Outcomes:
Considerations with a Value-Added Approach

• Motivation (for direct measures)
  – How do we ensure students take assessment seriously? Is there a hook?

• Is growth due to our interventions?
  – How do you control for all the variables that could influence the outcomes?
Other Considerations

• Do all types of students and sub-populations experience or benefit from the program in the same way?
  – Disaggregate data by sub-populations
    • Ex:
      – Minority
      – First-generation
      – Gender
      – Ability level
      – Transfer
Model 1: An Experimental Design with random assignment to treatment or non treatment groups. Differences in outcomes can be directly attributed to level of participation in the intervention, because all other student characteristics and experiences vary randomly.

(Rarely possible in educational interventions.)
Model 2: Mandatory intervention models do not have contemporary comparison groups.

Prior-Year Students -> Other factors -> T₁ -> Learning/Behavioral Outcomes

Current Students -> Other factors -> T₁ -> Learning/Behavioral Outcomes

Use benchmarking (comparison to a similar external group) or be compared to students from prior years (before the intervention began.)

Similar Students -> Other factors -> T₁ -> Learning/Behavioral Outcomes
Model 3: An elective intervention which does not fully meet the demand for enrollment produces three groups, 1) enrolled students, 2) students who wanted to but we denied enrollment, and 3) students who did not wish to enroll. Group 2 is a perfect control group for Group 1.
Section 4: What do we do now?

- Identify learning outcomes
- Document what you already know
- Gather evidence
- Identify appropriate methods of measurement
- Interpret evidence
- Disseminate results
- Implement change
You can’t fatten a pig by weighing it.
Interpret Evidence

• Questions:
  – What conclusions can you draw from the data? How did you do? Are there students you are not reaching? Are there needs you are not meeting?
  – What other questions do the data raise? What other information might you need?
  – What are the implications for practice or what policy decisions would you make?

• Methods:
  – Disaggregate your data
  – Don’t interpret in isolation
Implement Change

• Dissemination of results
  – Who needs to know this information?
  – How do they need to know the information?
  – When do they need to know this information?

• Purpose of assessment is to CREATE ACTION to:
  – Continue effective practice
  – Initiate change and improvement
  – **STOP** doing what is not working

• Changes lead to new outcomes and assessment plans
• Focus on **one** thing at a time
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