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## Presentation #13: Part II - Learning Outcomes Assessment in Student Services

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In response to the new accreditation standards, Student Services must specify learning outcomes and then administer assessments to see if students have actually acquired these learning outcomes. The last presentation reviewed steps that Student Service units can take to prepare a plan for assessing their contribution to student learning outcomes. In that presentation, we used student government as the context for developing the unit's mission statement, goals, and learning outcomes. This presentation covers assessment tools and assessment-related issues to consider for assessing learning outcomes in student government as well as all other functions and units within student services. (The authors of this presentation wish to acknowledge Dr. Marilee Bresciani at the University of North Carolina much of this presentation is adapted from her excellent work.)

1. Develop an assessment plan. The unit staff should meet to brainstorm the types of data that would best measure the unit's contribution to student learning. As mentioned in the previous presentation, focus your very first effort on assessing the unit's top learning outcome.
2. Preliminary considerations. In making the choice of assessment tools, consider the types of evidence that will provide information to make decisions, influence constituents, and be most easily justified. One must also consider that assessment tools vary in terms of cost (although many can be designed in-house), and the logistics to administer them. Finally, carefully consider the extent to which any possible assessment method can realistically be incorporated into your annual responsibilities. Trying to measure too much using a logistically complicated process probably will doom you to failure.
3. Direct versus indirect evidence. While there are literally dozens of measures and assessment strategies available for student service units, evidence of learning falls into two categories, direct and indirect. Direct methods of collecting information require students to display their knowledge and skills. Indirect methods ask students or someone else to reflect on the student learning rather than to demonstrate it. Other indirect methods involve institutional statistics such as transfer rates or diversity of the student body. Dr. Marilee Bresciani (2003) provides a helpful list of each type of evidence. Some methods that provide direct evidence include student work samples, portfolios, capstone projects, embedded assessment (where test questions or skill performance assessment of

the learning outcome is embedded in regular course exams), observations of student behavior, juried review of student projects, evaluations of performance, externally reviewed internship, performance on a case study/problem, performance on a problem analysis (student explains how he/she solved the problem), national licensure examinations, locally developed tests, standardized tests, pre and post tests, essay tests scored blindly. Some methods that provide direct evidence include surveys in which respondents (e.g., students, employers, alumni) provide perceptions of learning progress, focus groups, exit interviews with graduates, percentage of students who transfer, retention studies, job placement statistics, percentage of students who study abroad, diversity of the student body, enrollment trends, and academic performance after transfer. It is important to note that many colleges have been collecting and reporting on indirect types of evidence for years. On the other hand, good practice dictates that the majority of learning outcome measures should be direct, rather than indirect. Direct evidence is more useful and more convincing when it comes to assessing learning outcomes.

4. Scoring rubrics. Many of the direct evidence assessment methods listed above -- observations of student behavior, evaluations of student work samples, portfolios -- require a systematic scoring procedure. Rubrics are an especially useful tool for this purpose. A rubric is “a set of criteria and a scoring scale that is used to assess and evaluate students’ work. Often rubrics identify levels or ranks with criteria indicated for each level” (Campbell, Melenzyer, Nettles, and Wyman, 2000). Rubrics help the assessment process in many ways. First, staff must create the rubric; this encourages important thought and dialogue about what constitutes acceptable performance. A rubric greatly clarifies for evaluators what he/she should look for as evidence of learning. When shared with students, the rubric clarifies for students what is expected of them, how they will be assessed, and helps them identify their own learning. Since they are designed “in-house” and belong to the unit, rubrics are free. Finally, a rubric increases agreement across different evaluators; an important property known as cross-rater reliability. There are several popular rubric resource web sites having many examples that can be modified for your own application. One site even provides fun, simple lessons on how to make a rubric (<http://teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-4521.html>). San Diego State University provides a rubric template -- [http://edweb.sdsu.edu/triton/july/rubrics/Rubric\\_Template.html](http://edweb.sdsu.edu/triton/july/rubrics/Rubric_Template.html)). Mary Allen’s, an assessment expert in the CSU system, created this excellent resource site -- [http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/SLOA/links/using\\_rubrics.shtml](http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/SLOA/links/using_rubrics.shtml)

5. Examples of standardized assessment tools. The Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) gathers information about the kinds of academic (including co-curricular) experiences students have had

while attending the college, as well as students' self-perceptions of their growth in a number of learning areas. I highly recommend that you examine a copy of this instrument. The CCSEQ can provide excellent indirect evidence for some student service units. Contact information: Center for the Study of Higher Education, 308 Browning Hall, The University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152 Phone: (901) 678-2775 Fax: (901) 678-4291. The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) can be used both as a diagnostic assessment in a "how to study" class, and as a pre and post test assessment of the students' learning of study strategies. An examination copy of the LASSI, a direct measure of learning, can be obtained from this web site: <http://www.hhpubco.com/LASSI/>

6. Evaluating an assessment instrument. There are key criteria to keep in mind when evaluating a commercially available instrument. While this topic is beyond the scope of this presentation, readers can download an excellent resource document for free: <http://www.cccco.edu/divisions/ss/matriculation/attachments/stdpoprevalass.pdf>

7. Sampling tips. Assessment can be expensive in terms of instrument purchase and staff time to prepare, administer, and process the assessments. It is important to know that strategic sampling, rather than blanket assessment, is an available option. It is much more efficient, meaningful, and cost effective to restrict sampling to students who have used a unit's service, rather than using a shotgun approach in which you hope to capture input from at least some students who used the unit's service.

8. Hard copy and electronic format assessment. Sampling with paper assessment can be made more efficient through the use of scannable answer sheets. Some colleges are relying on electronic means (e.g., survey software for their learning outcomes assessment, and electronic portfolios for gathering and storing evidence). Electronic surveys, when appropriate, eliminate a great deal of cost and processing time associated with paper assessment.

9. Partnering with other student service units. For a variety of reasons, some units will move more quickly than others to develop and implement their learning assessment plan. A major reason for this will be the availability of unit staff having assessment interest and/or experience. A second reason will be that some units, compared to other, perform functions clearly more amenable to outcomes assessment. Partnering with other units, both within and outside the college, might be of immense help. If you are interested in sharing unit mission statements, objectives, outcome statements, assessment tools (e.g., surveys, rubrics, focus group or interview protocols), or documentation systems you've developed, please let us know by completing the brief electronic survey attached. We will use this information to prepare contact information lists organized by unit function.

The information will be handled very discreetly and will be distributed only to those who have participated in the survey.

10. Close the assessment loop. After collection and review of the assessment data, prepare a report. Keep it brief because no one reads lengthy reports. Document where students are, and are not, meeting the intended outcomes. Document decisions made to improve the program and assessment plan. Other topics to address in the report include unexpected outcomes, recommendations, conclusions, different groups or cohorts of students to assess, and the schedule for re-assessment. Finally, modify the assessment methods as needed and repeat the process when appropriate

Questions: Have any of the student service units at your college engaged in dialogues about student learning outcomes? What kinds of student service learning outcomes have been identified? Have you started assessing any of these outcomes? What assessment tools and strategies are being used? Please let us know by responding to this brief electronic survey. [Click here](#) ->Survey on Student Service Outcomes. We will prepare a summary of feedback received from you and others and share it on this listserv (your identify and your college's identify will not be revealed in the summary).

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