

## Good Practice in Higher Education

### Assessment as Good Practice

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## Systematic Inquiry...

...entails "examining, understanding, and applying the extensive body of research and scholarship about college outcomes and learning environments";

..."means making effective use of institutional research activities";

...questions [higher education] programs, practices, policies, and services in terms of their impact on student learning and their contribution to the educational mission of the institution.

~ Pascarella & Whitt, 1999

## What is assessment?

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“Assessment is any effort to **gather**, **analyze**, and **interpret** evidence which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness.”

~ Schuh & Upcraft, 1996, p.18

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## What is assessment?

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“How well do we achieve our educational intentions? How do we know? Therein lies the wellspring of an institutional commitment to assessment - **intellectual curiosity** about what and how well our students learn. Assessment is the means of answering those questions of curiosity about our work as educators.”

~ Maki, 2004, p. 2

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## What is assessment?

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"...the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve student learning."

~ Walvoord, 2004

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## Why assessment?

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- Survival
- Strategic planning
- Policy development and decision-making
- Quality
- Affordability / cost-effectiveness

~ Schuh & Upcraft, 2001

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## Purposes of Assessment

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- What are we trying to do and why?
- How well are we accomplishing that which we say we are?
- How do we know?
- How do we use the information to improve or to celebrate our successes?
- How well do our improvements work?

~ adapted from Bresciani, M.J.

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## Types of Assessment

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Schuh & Upcraft, 2001

- Tracking usage
  - Needs
  - Satisfaction
  - Campus cultures and environments
  - Outcomes
  - Comparable institution
  - National standards
  - Cost effectiveness
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## Steps for Assessment Planning

adapted from Schuh & Upcraft, 2001

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1. What circumstances are driving our assessment?
    - § opportunities / concerns / pressures
  2. Who are the stakeholders in this project?
  3. What is the **purpose** of our assessment?
  4. What needs / experiences / outcomes are we interested in studying?
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## Steps for Assessment Planning

adapted from Schuh & Upcraft, 2001

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5. What approach(es) best meets our assessment needs?
    - § What information do we need?
    - § What is the best way to get that information?
  6. What assessment tools / protocols will best meet our needs?
  7. Who is our population for the assessment?  
How will we identify our sample?
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## Steps for Assessment Planning

adapted from Schuh & Upcraft, 2001

8. How will we collect our data?
9. How will we analyze our data?
10. How will we evaluate the results for policy and practice implications? Other implications?
11. How will we effectively report / use the results?

### Assessment Cycle



from Peggy Maki, 2004

#### Steps in the Assessment Cycle...

- a. Keep in mind the mission and educational objectives.
- b. Begin by identifying desired outcomes related to the mission / educational objectives.
- c. Determine how you will assess the identified outcomes. What is the purpose of your assessment? What methods and measures will be useful? What population will you sample?
- d. Collect data using appropriate means.
- e. Analyze the collected data and interpret the evidence according to the assessment purposes.
- f. Use the interpreted evidence to guide decisions about improving practices and making curricular or programmatic changes.
- g. Begin again.

## Lessons Learned

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- ❑ Don't fly solo!
    - ❑ Build bridges to collaboration.
    - ❑ Find out what efforts are already in place.
    - ❑ Talk it up!
  - ❑ Institutional mission and educational outcomes are foundational.
  - ❑ Start *somewhere*.
  - ❑ Less is sometimes more.
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## Lessons Learned

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- ❑ Follow the "good enough" rule.
    - ❑ There's no substitute for good data.
    - ❑ Acknowledge the limitations.
  - ❑ Projects must be *feasible* and *useful*.
  - ❑ Close the loop!
    - ❑ Data collection is not assessment.
    - ❑ Analysis does not have to be complex.
    - ❑ Share the results and discuss the implications.
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## Lessons Learned

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- ❑ Bad news, good news.
    - ❑ Celebrate successes.
    - ❑ Highlight areas for improvement.
  - ❑ *All* assessment is political.
  - ❑ Never compromise ethical standards.
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## In closing...

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"To improve learning and promote learning communities, we must recognize that successful assessment is *not* primarily a question of technical skill, but rather one of **human will.**"

~ Angelo, 1999

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## Resources

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- American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, D.C.: Authors.
- Banta, T.W., Lund, J.P., Black, K.E., & Oblander, F.W. (1996). *Assessment in practice: Putting principles to work on college campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), (2006). *Frameworks for assessing learning and development outcomes*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., & Whitt, E.J. (2005). *Assessing conditions to enhance educational effectiveness: The inventory for student engagement and success*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for learning: Building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Walvoord, B.E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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