**The four main purposes of program assessment are:**

**To improve –**the assessment process should provide feedback to determine how the program can be improved.

**To inform –**the assessment process should inform decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the program.

**To prove –**the assessment process should encapsulate and demonstrate to students, faculty, staff and outsiders what the program is accomplishing.

**To support –**the assessment process should provide support for campus decision-making activities such as program review and strategic planning, as well as external accountability activities such as accreditation.

UCA Student Services is already assessing—you do it every day in your work. The programs that you offer now are not the exact same ones that you had first planned; because, as you respond to student needs/problems/new technology, etc. things change. In assessment terminology, you ‘closed the loop.’

So, if we are already doing this, why does assessment have such a negative connotation? In part, this is because it is often linked to accreditation—you don’t do it because you want to, but because you are being MADE to by an accrediting body.

At its heart, assessment is about **continuous improvement**—helping our students do better because we are more conscious about the way we plan, our expectations for students, and whether our programs allow students to demonstrate their knowledge/skills. If we can view assessment as a tool for ongoing program improvement, we may no longer view it as a chore.

Assessment activities are more about defining, tightening, and examining what we already do than about making new work. For example, think of a program that you are already offering, how do you evaluate it? How do you review your activities and make adjustments for future programs? These are assessment activities designed to strengthen your work.

You will need, as a program, to evaluate what your findings mean and how you can improve what you are doing— ‘closing the loop.’ This may take some additional time—but the discussion is how you can reap the rewards of your work in assessment.

# Terms

### Assessment

Assessment is the systematic and ongoing method of gathering, analyzing and using information from measured outcomes to improve student learning.

### Assessment Plan

A document that states a program’s purpose, intended student learning outcomes of that program, and details a series of assessment procedures and the criteria by which the level of achievement will be demonstrated.

### Student Learning Outcomes (SLO’s)

Student outcomes are succinct statements that describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. These outcomes relate to skills, knowledge and behaviors that students acquire as they progress through the program. (From ABET: Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology)

### Direct Measures

Assessments based on an analysis of student behaviors or products in which they demonstrate how well they have mastered learning outcomes. “Directly evaluates student work. Examples of direct measures include exams, papers, projects, computer programs, interactions with a client.”-Walvoord (2004) p. 13

### Indirect Measures

Assessments based on an analysis of reported perceptions about student mastery of learning outcomes. “Student (or others) perceptions of how well students have achieved an objective.” -Allen (2004) p. 169.

**A VISUAL TO HELP**



AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Process) uses this visual and these six steps to continuous improvement of student learning. These steps are: identify goals, identify student learning outcomes, specify approaches, specify measures, evaluate and share results and make changes.

Assessment cannot be haphazard

# Step 1: Create Program Purpose and Goals

**Think about what the program’s purpose and goals are.**This is not the department’s mission statement. These are the skills/knowledge that you want students to have upon completion of the program. Remember as you do this that you are going to have to link measurable [Student Learning Outcomes](http://uca.edu/assessment/terms/) to these goals. Effective goals are broadly stated, meaningful, achievable and assessable. Goals should provide a framework for determining the more specific Student Learning Outcomes of a program and should be consistent with your department mission and the UCA mission.

Here’s an example from Cal Poly Pomona:

The program of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will produce graduates who:

1. Understand and can apply fundamental concepts of the discipline.
2. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
3. Conduct sound research.
4. Address issues critically and reflectively.
5. Create solutions to problems.
6. Work well with others.
7. Respect persons from diverse cultures and backgrounds.
8. Are committed to open-minded inquiry and lifelong learning.

# Step 2: Create Measurable Student Learning Outcomes

Once you have created your program purpose and goals, the next step is to create [Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)](http://uca.edu/assessment/terms/) for each goal. Think about what a student should know or be able to demonstrate upon his/her completion of your program, keeping in mind you are going to have to come up with a way to measure that it is happening. Also keep in mind that you want at least one of the measures to be direct rather than indirect. SLOs are stated operationally and describe the observable evidence of a student's knowledge, skill, ability, attitude or disposition. State clearly each outcome you are seeking: How would you recognize it? What does it look like? What will the student be able to do? Common words used are: describe, classify, distinguish, explain, interpret, give examples of, etc.

**What are student learning outcomes?**

Student learning outcomes or SLOs are statements that specify what students will know, be able to do or be able to demonstrate when they have completed or participated in a program/activity/course/project. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes or values.

**What are the characteristics of good SLOs?**

SLOs specify an action by the student that must be observable, measurable and able to be demonstrated! Goals vs. Outcomes: Goals are broad and typically focus on "what we are going to do" rather than what our recipients are "going to get out of what we do." Outcomes are program -specific.

**Writing S.M.A.R.T. SLOs**

•**S**pecific – clear, definite terms describing the abilities, knowledge, values, attitudes and performance desired. Use action words or concrete verbs.

• **M**easurable – Your SLO should have a measurable outcome and a target can be set, so that you can determine when you have reached it.

• **A**chievable – Know the outcome is something your students can accomplish

• **R**ealistic – make sure the outcome is practical in that it can be achieved in a reasonable time frame

• **T**ime-bound – When will the outcome be done? Identify a specific timeframe.

(<http://www.chaffey.edu/slo/resources/SLO_handbook.pdf>)

**OPERATIONAL OUTCOMES**

200 students will participate in the Emerging Leaders Program by the end of the 2013 – 14 academic year.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

As a result of participating in the Emerging Leaders Program, students will develop and hone meeting facilitation skills.

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

80% of all students will lead a student organization during their college career.

**MEANINGFUL:** Is this outcome aligned with our Division or department Mission or goals?

**MANAGEABLE:** Is this outcome actually achievable and assessable?

**MEASURABLE:** Can you articulate how you would know you achieved the outcome?

Follow the formula: Condition *Audience* **Behavior** Degree

As a result of participating in the leadership workshop, *students* **will demonstrate** three of the five leadership criteria.

**For each SLO, use the following checklist to examine its quality:**

1. Does the outcome support the program goals? Y N

2. Does the outcome describe what the program intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective, attitudinal), or do (behavioral, performance)? Y N

3. Is the outcome important/worthwhile? Y N

4. Is the outcome:

     a. Detailed and specific? Y N

     b. Measurable/identifiable? Y N

     c. A result of learning? Y N

5. Do you have/can you create an activity to enable students to learn the desired outcome? Y N

6. Do you have a direct or indirect tool as measurements (direct if possible)? Y N

7. Can outcome be used to make decisions on how to improve the program? Y N

**Try using this for writing Student Learning Outcomes:**

As a result of students participating in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, they will be able to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Ex: As a result of students participating in the resident assistant training session for writing incident report forms, they will be able to write concisely, include factual details in their reports and use language that is non-judgmental.

(Lora Scagliola, University of Rhode Island Student Affairs, 6/24/2007) Drawn in part from: Keeling & Associates, Inc. (2003, January). Developing Learning Outcomes That Work. Atlanta, GA. Fowler, B. (1996). Bloom’s Taxonomy and Critical Thinking. Retrieved February 23, 2005 from <http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.us/longview/ctac/blooms.htm>; Template adapted from: Gail Short Hanson, American University, as originally published in Learning Reconsidered 2, p. 39.

# Step 3: Develop the Measurement Tool

Now that you know what Student Learning Outcomes you want to assess, you need to figure out how you are going to collect the necessary data. Keep in mind you want as many of these measurement tools to be [direct](http://uca.edu/assessment/terms/) rather than [indirect](http://uca.edu/assessment/terms/) data. This may take some creative thinking on our part. Keep in mind that if you can create a measurement tool out of something you are already doing that you should do so!

**Indirect measures** are those that rely on reports of learning. These may be valuable in providing information about what students are learning and how this learning is valued. These can be reports by students themselves, instructors, supervisors (of interns or service learning) or employers. The strength of these kinds of measures is that they can get at implicit qualities of student learning such as values and attitudes and can take into account a variety of perspectives. The weakness is that these measures provide no direct evidence of student learning.

**Direct measures** are those that are taken directly from student work. The strength of these measures are that you can capture a sample of what students can do, which is strong evidence of student learning. Direct measures though may be weak in measuring values, attitudes, feelings and perceptions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Direct Measures** | **Indirect Measures** |
| * Essay test question
* Research paper
* Oral presentation
* Multiple-choice test question
* Performance piece (e.g., musical recital)
* Case analysis
* Standardized test
* Class project (individual or group)
* Poster presentation
* Internship or practicum
* Capstone projects, senior theses, exhibits, or performances
* Pass rates or scores on licensure, certification, or subject area tests
* Student publications or conference presentations
 | * Survey of current students
* Survey of faculty members
* Survey of internship supervisors
* Survey of graduates
* Survey of employers
* Survey of transfer institutions
* Acceptance rates into graduate programs
* Job placement data
* Exit interviews
 |

# Step 4: Collecting Data

Now that your measurement tool is in place you need to decide how you will collect your data: will you measure everyone or a random sample? If the latter, you need to be sure that you have tested a sufficient number to get workable data. For example, if you have 250 majors in your program surveying only 50 of them **will not**be sufficient to give you meaningful results. If you have a large number of people or a complicated measurement tool, it may not be feasible to test everyone. In that case sampling is acceptable. If you are unsure whether or not to sample and how to go about it, contact the UCA Director of Assessment who will be happy to help you.

Probably the easiest way to manage your data will be in some kind of spreadsheet. If you are going to have multiple people using a rubric, you might create a template so you’ll be sure to get the data in the same way when you merge it all together.

# Step 5: Report Your Findings

**Assessment Report Format**

The choice of report format should be based on the material in the report and its audience. **Full reports**are useful to audiences interested in the details of an assessment. They can also serve as complete records of assessment activities. **Assessment summaries**are used to highlight particular findings, to focus on specific issues, and to summarize assessment activities for audiences not inclined to read a full report. Results can also be used in assessment notes, brochures, or flyers to publicize an assessment project or finding or highlight a particular program. **Web reporting**provides easy access to a wide range of audiences, makes specific data available and interactive, and enables audiences to answer customized questions.

**Assessment Report Components**

♦ Description of activities:

What did we do?

Why did we do it?

How did we do it?

Who did we assess?

♦Description of results

What did we find?

♦ Interpretation

What do our findings mean?

♦ Suggestions/Implications

What should or could be done based upon results of the assessment?

Based on the results that you received, will any modifications be made to improve student learning?

Use the results to:

Evaluate SLOs: Are there too many, do they need clarification, are they appropriate?

Evaluate program calendar: Does it address all of the learning goals? How can programs offered be modified to do so?

Evaluate the assessment methods used: Were they appropriate?

*Questions from:*

[*http://www.csustan.edu/ASL/Documents-Forms/Assessment%20Workbook0506.pdf*](http://www.csustan.edu/ASL/Documents-Forms/Assessment%20Workbook0506.pdf)*&*

*Adapted from Suskie (2004) Chapter 16*

**Step 6: Close the Loop**

Once you have data and an assessment plan that include specific goals, you will need to analyze and report the data. What does the data tell you? What is the program doing effectively (what goals are you meeting)? What goals are you not meeting? MOST IMPORTANTLY—why are those goals not being met? Answering this question will help you close the loop! Some things to consider: are the percentages/goals you set too high? Did you collect sufficient data to explain what the problem might be? (Do you need a better assessment instrument to figure out why students aren’t performing as you hoped).

Once you have analyzed the data, how do you plan to learn from it and improve in the future? This is typically the most difficult step and typically where assessment breaks down. There are several factors that can lead to failure to complete this process some common ones include:

* Incomplete definition of assessment
* Trying to do too much or too complicated assessment
* Philosophical resistance
* Conflict with other faculty duties
* Lack of leadership
* Poor/inadequate data collection

So, you have data. It needs to be interpreted. What does it tell you? What are the strengths, weaknesses and needs? Once you have done this, the question is how will you use this data to improve the program/course. What kinds of changes can you implement to get different outcomes? Who will implement and manage the changes? Will you alter the assessment plan in some way to either get better data to make the process more effective/ask better questions?

**Why close the loop?** Assessment is worthless if you do not take the opportunity to use it as a tool for improvement. Here are some of the benefits:

* Return on the investment of time you put in to create the assessment tool
* Improvement of learning
* Stronger program/course
* Happier, more successful students & employers
* Better retention & graduation rates
* More successful accreditation review
* Shared campus understanding of mission, learning goals, and what is being done to achieve them

**Step 1: Create Program Purpose and Goals**

**A goal is an end result written in broad terms**

**For example:**

**As a result of participating in the Emerging Leaders Program, students will increase their leadership skills**

**Your turn:**

**Step 2: Create Measurable Student Learning Outcomes**

**MEANINGFUL MANAGEABLE MEASURABLE**

Follow the formula: Condition *Audience* **Behavior** Degree

As a result of participating in the leadership workshop, *students* **will demonstrate** three of the five leadership criteria.

**Your turn:**

**GOOD PRACTICES**

The following principles of good practice, adapted from the Astin et al. (1992), Northern Arizona University (2006), and the University of Delaware (n.d.) provide important guidance for assessment efforts:

♦ The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

♦ Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.

♦ Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

♦ Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

♦ Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

♦ Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

♦ Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

♦ Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

♦ Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

♦ Educational programs, in order to be successful, require full engagement of faculty and staff members in the conversations about, and the design and practice of, student learning outcomes assessment.

♦ Faculty and staff members determine the desired learning outcomes for students in their department/program.

♦ Faculty and staff members devise and implement the assessment methodologies that are most appropriate for their stated outcomes.

♦ Faculty and staff members maximize existing approaches: Assessments at the degree-program level should trend toward seamlessness, taking advantage of existing student projects, exams, and performances (i.e., embedded assessments). We caution ambitious programs to keep assessments manageable and informative.

♦ Academic, student affairs, and other units as appropriate are best suited to determine how to use the assessment results for internal programmatic improvements.

♦ The assessment process is iterative within units, is manageable within resource bases, is objective, and is meaningful to both faculty and staff members and students.

♦ Assessment is not an exercise, but a means of gathering and usinginformation that faculty and staff members have determined to be important and integral to future decision-making about programmatic quality and capacities.

**The following bulleted lists are "Reporting Assessment Results" from Ball State’s Assessment Handbook**

**Sharing Assessment Results**

Suskie suggests the following guidelines for sharing your assessment results:

♦ Use good teaching practices to share assessment results.

♦ The briefer the assessment report is, the more likely it will be used.

♦ Three kinds of information are most important to share:

\*How you and your colleagues define a successful student

\*Whether you are satisfied with your evidence of student success

\*What you are doing about unsatisfactory results

♦ Tables, charts, and other visuals may be more effective than traditional written reports.

**Honest, Balanced, Fair, and Useful Reporting of Assessment Results**

Suskie recommends doing the following to ensure appropriate reporting:

♦ Share only aggregated results.

♦ Present results completely, fairly, and objectively.

♦ Provide appropriate attribution.

♦ Document the author, office, and date of assessment reports.

♦ Offer to make additional information available.

**What will audiences for assessment results care most about?**

♦ Matters they can do something about

♦ Interesting and unanticipated findings

♦ Meaningful differences