Annual Assessment Planning

This handout provides information, ideas, and brainstorming worksheets for programs that have not yet chosen assessment methods for their next annual assessment project.

Overview of Assessment of Program Learning Outcomes

Assessment of a program's student learning outcomes is an ongoing process for examining and improving student learning. While students are graded in individual courses each term, each student is enrolled in a degree, with a carefully designed curriculum that represents something larger than the simple aggregation of individual classes. Assessment of program learning outcomes is NOT an evaluation of individual instructors, individual students, or individual courses. Instead, this process helps faculty examine how students develop knowledge and skills and transfer them to new contexts over multiple semesters, and to determine whether students as a whole successfully learn what the program intends to teach them.

First and foremost, assessment is a tool for faculty to use in order to answer questions about student learning. It is also a requirement of U.S. accreditors like Middle States that all academic programs have student learning outcomes, assess student achievement of these outcomes, and use the information gathered to improve student learning. While FIT faculty engage in many forms of assessment already, it is necessary for the College to document assessment practices, as well as how programs make use of assessment findings for improvement, in order to meet Middle States expectations.

Selecting Assessment Methods

There are many ways to examine student achievement of learning outcomes. Listed below are methods that are likely to be used by FIT programs. Many of these methods are already used at FIT, although they may not be documented.

In most years, programs should choose a "direct" method of assessment – one in which faculty, or appropriate experts, examine student work. There are many ways programs can assess student learning, and not all of them are listed here. Programs can work with Carolyn Comiskey, Executive Director of Assessment, to brainstorm other methods, or to adapt current methods to meet FIT requirements.

Direct (Clear and Compelling) Evidence of What Students Are Learning

- "Capstone" experiences such as research projects, presentations, theses, dissertations, oral defenses, exhibitions (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Portfolios of student work (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Student assignments or projects from required courses (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Faculty "cluster review" or discussion of student work (when related to program learning outcomes for the cohort and documented)
- Observations of student behavior (e.g., presentations, group discussions), undertaken and with notes recorded systematically
- Summaries/analyses of electronic discussion threads
- Scores on multiple choice and/or essay tests in key courses, accompanied by test "blueprints" that match exam questions to student learning outcomes
- Ratings of student skills (that are also learning outcomes) by field experience/internship supervisors or employers
- Student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs, if developing those are intended outcomes of the program

Indirect Evidence of Student Learning
(Signs that Students Are Probably Learning, But Exactly What or How Much They Are Learning is Less Clear)

- Assignment grades, if not accompanied by a rubric or scoring guide
- Student ratings of their knowledge and skills
- Student/alumni satisfaction with their learning, collected through surveys, senior exit interviews, or focus groups
- Placement rates of graduates into appropriate career positions and starting salaries
- For four-year programs, admission rates into graduate programs and graduation rates from those programs
- Alumni perceptions of their career responsibilities and satisfaction
- Student participation rates in faculty research, publications and conference presentations
- Honors, awards, and scholarships earned by students and alumni

Adapted from: Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Tips for Selecting Methods

- Use existing program processes for evaluating students as assessment methods, such as annual student performance reviews, department meetings that discuss student learning, and cluster reviews. Programs may need to make some changes to these practices to adapt them for thinking about a group of students (instead of individuals) or to document them differently.

- Use existing student assignments/projects and academic milestones whenever possible, since these are embedded in the curriculum.

- o Programs can use curriculum maps to identify courses where student work at a particular level can be collected for assessment.

- Manage assessment so that the grading practices instructors already employ can be used as a source of assessment evidence. For example, faculty may complete rubrics to grade students; rows related to particular learning outcomes can be aggregated to provide assessment information.

- Bundle the assessment of learning outcomes where it makes sense. Students may demonstrate multiple learning outcomes in the same assignment or project, and these can be assessed together. Capstone projects in particular usually require students to demonstrate several learning outcomes at once, integrating their learning into a single product.

- Student work should come from courses and assignments that are required for all students. Work from an elective course, or from an assignment chosen by some students, may reflect what students with certain interests can do, not all students. Student work that is optional or extra-credit may not provide reliable information about learning (e.g. due to lacks of representativeness of student volunteers or motivational issues)

- Sample student work *when it makes sense*. Sampling must be done cautiously in order to ensure that the student work is representative of the program and provides reliable information to faculty.

- Supplement the "direct assessment" of student work with indirect methods, such as surveys, job placement results, and other methods, to provide additional information. Student learning is complex and multiple methods are needed to truly understand it.

Program Assessment Planning Worksheets

These two exercises are designed to assist programs in brainstorming possible methods for assessing student learning. Assessment works best when it addresses real questions faculty have about student learning, to gather information in order to make programmatic decisions. The first grid guides faculty in connecting their questions about learning to assessment methods. Since program learning outcomes list what program faculty members think is most important for students to learn, assessing student learning should focus upon these areas. The second exercise is to foster brainstorming of possible methods for assessing learning outcomes.

1. Program Questions about Student Learning

Questions About Student Learning: List questions that faculty have about student learning in their programs	**Why?** Is there a reason for asking this question? What will the program do with this information?	**How?** Brainstorm possible methods that the program could use to answer this question
Example: Faculty want to know whether course FIT250, taken in the 1st semester of the Bachelor's program, is adequate preparation for FIT550, taken in the 4th semester.	*Example: Some faculty teaching FIT550 feel that students are unprepared in two areas (program learning outcomes 4 and 5). They aren't sure whether FIT 250 hasn't prepared students or whether students have forgotten the skills by FIT 550. The program is considering revising FIT250.*	*Example: Faculty teaching FIT250 and FIT550 could create a rubric, apply to student work in FIT250, and analyze results together; Faculty could use a curriculum map to analyze where program learning outcomes 4 and 5 are reinforced in semesters 2 and 3; etc.*

2. Methods for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes

In the first column, list program learning outcomes. In the next column, "Learning Opportunities," note the courses and, when possible, assignments in which students have opportunities to learn and practice the outcome. The information in this column can assist faculty in thinking about the possible assessment methods to list in the third column, for

methods the program currently uses or could use for collecting information as to how students are mastering the learning outcomes. Refer to the *Evidence of Student Learning* resource for a list of possible methods.

Program Learning Outcomes	Learning Opportunities (Courses/ Projects)	Potential Assessment Methods
List program learning outcomes below	In what course(s) do students learn, practice and reinforce the outcome? Where in the curriculum (or external activity) do they best demonstrate it? (it is useful to refer to the curriculum map)	What evidence could faculty collect to determine whether students have mastered the outcome? Does this evidence already exist as part of students' regular coursework or other activities?

Insert Rows as Needed