

Andrews University

Practices that Contribute to Successful Assessment of Learner Outcomes

1. Start with clear statements of what students should be able to know, do, and think as a result of the department curriculum. Be specific about how you will know (i.e., how, and when, you will measure) these outcomes. Consider how and when concepts are introduced, reinforced, and emphasized throughout the curriculum when deciding when to measure accomplishment.
2. Use both direct and indirect measures to evaluate student achievement of learning goals. For example, evaluate a group of papers by graduating seniors against standardized expectations (a direct measure of student performance) or survey students about their learning behaviors and perceptions of learning (an indirect measure of student experience).
3. Students who participate in assessment activities need to understand their role in the assessment activity, its purpose, and how results will be used. Students may come to the task with greater commitment if they understand that the goal is to improve the program.
4. Do not assess every learning goal every year. For example, a program with five discrete learning goals might evaluate each goal in turn. Or one distinct methodology may be applied at any one time. Break the task into achievable units to maintain a manageable assessment program. Or, consider a small set of “dashboard indicators” to be measured every year and a larger set of outcomes which are measured on a rotating basis.
5. Employ the highest research standards possible within the limits posed by resources and expertise. The value of measurement increases if it is taken repeatedly over time and especially if the same measurement is taken repeatedly over a period of time that spans a change in the program. Such trend analyses are likely to be sensitive to change over time.
6. Use both formative and summative elements. For example, student performance on a goal might be evaluated upon conclusion of a course required for admission to the major (as an early formative measure) and the same goal might be evaluated when those students complete their degree requirements (a final summative measure).
7. Collect, retain, and summarize data in ways that facilitate its use. Use data to support academic judgment.
8. Collect data when it becomes available even if the analysis of the data will take place later. Examples: course closeout information; course evaluation reports; collections of capstone papers; faculty evaluations of preliminary or comprehensive exams. Collect the same data at the same time each term and/or year since time series data are essential to high-quality assessment.
9. When possible, available, and useful, make use of university reports; e.g., data from the Office of Institutional Assessment about student performance on university-wide tools.
10. If assessment projects involve interaction with individuals, seek advice from the Institutional Review Board, affiliated with the Office of Institutional Research, Room 210, Administration Building (e-mail: irb@andrews.edu).