

## **AAHE - 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning**

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### **1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.**

- Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement.
- Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strives to help them achieve.
- Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so.
- Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

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

- Learning is a complex process
- It entails not only what students know but also what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom.
- Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration.
- Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

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

- Assessment is a goal-oriented process.
- It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals.
- Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned.
- Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

### **4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.**

- Information about outcomes is of high importance where students' "end up" matters greatly.
- But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes
- Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

### **5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.**

- Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative.
- Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time.
- This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester.

- The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.
  - Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
- 6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community is involved.**
- Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility.
  - Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community.
  - Faculty plays an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students.
  - Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, and employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning.
  - Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
- 7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.**
- Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement.
  - But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about.
  - This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made.
  - It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom.
  - The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
- 8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.**
- Assessment alone changes little.
  - Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at.
  - On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions.
  - On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
- 9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.**
- There is a compelling public stake in education.
  - As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations.
  - But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to us, our students, and society -- is to improve.
  - Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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