Assessment


   The author defines assessment as “the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decision about how to improve learning.”

   “Assessment is a kind of ‘action research’... to inform local practice.” A process of seeking “the best available indicators” to see if goals are being met. Includes field-specific and professional judgments about learning outcomes which are used to “inform departmental and institutional decisions.”

   “Assessment means basing decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, advising, and student support upon the best possible data about student learning and the factors that affect it.”

   A process that involves 1) establishing goals for student learning, 2) gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence for how well students meet those goals, and 3) using the information to improve.

   Assessment can span from the classroom to program and institutional levels, from class project evaluations to alignment of that evaluation to departmental learning goals.


   “Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development” (adapted from Marchese 1987).

   Assessment commonly refers to student outcomes assessment, but with an emphasis on “actual outcomes” rather than “intended outcomes, as described in statements of expectations.”

   Meaning of assessment is driven by questions it seeks to answer about what students should know, what the institution contributes to student growth, how learning can be improved. Assessments should include inputs and environment (i.e. where students start from), as well as students’ experiences through the process of schooling and educational outputs, where they end up.

“The purpose of assessment is to engage a campus community collectively in a systematic and continuing process to create shared learning goals and to enhance learning.”


This document defines assessment a bit tautologically, but sees it as part of an overall “planning-assessment cycle”: “defining... institutional and unit-level goals; implementing strategies to achieve those goals; assessing achievement of those goals; and using the results of the assessments to improve programs and services and inform planning and resource allocation decisions.”

5. “Beyond Bean Counting: Creating Departmental Assessment that is Manageable and Meaningful,” presentation by Patricia M. Dwyer (Kutztown University Assessment Symposium, 17 April 2008).

Assessment of student learning: the “process by which we ascertain through data collection if students have learned the skills, content, and habits of mind that will make them successful; if students are not learning, we decide on changes in the curriculum or teaching strategy to improve learning.”


Here, **outcomes** assessment is distinguished from individual student or classroom assessment and described as the process of examining the “achievement of groups of students to see what that may tell us about how to enrich our teaching, enable students to learn more, and improve the curriculum.”

7. From “Assessments Through the Learning Process” by Eric Shepherd and Janet Godwin, a white paper (Questionmark Corporation, 2004)

Assessment is the term generically used to describe quizzes, test, surveys, and exams. As a general category itself, assessment is “any systematic method of obtaining evidence from posing questions to draw inferences about the knowledge, attitudes, and other characteristics of
people for a specific purpose.” There are different uses of assessments: diagnostic, formative, needs, reaction, summative.


Assessment was associated with a new term in 1997, “institutional effectiveness,” and related to questions about “positive change and improvement in the institution” or “quality improvement.”


According to Frye, “when we assess our own performance, it’s assessment; when others assess our performance, it’s accountability. That is, assessment is a set of initiatives we take to monitor the results of our actions and improve ourselves; accountability is a set of initiatives others take to monitor the results of our actions, and to penalize or reward us based on the outcomes.”

“Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for education improvement” (AAHE qtd in Frye). “Assessment aims at the continuing improvement of student development, and is generally consistent with a ‘value-added’ concept of education; note that the rationale for having better programs is to ensure better student outcomes”


This cycle includes six steps which are aligned generally with the definition of assessment by Walvoord and the three steps she identifies. Here, a finer break-down of the process is provided: 1) identify goals, 2) identify objectives, 3) specific approaches, 4) specify measures, 5) evaluate and share results, 6) make changes.

Describing the importance of student learning assessment, the site lists various factors under the heading of “improvement”: the self-reflection of faculty and staff on “learning goals and instructional and service delivery”; determining how well goals “correspond to student and societal needs”; evaluating how well student activities and products align with expectations about their learning goals; communicating to students what specific skills, etc. they can expect to have learned from successfully completing a program; “help[ing] academic and students support units understand the dimensions of student learning when seeking to improve student achievement and the educational process.”

Banta’s article describes institutional leaders’ perspective on assessment as “finding ways to demonstrate and improve student learning” to promote positive institutional change. Also described by one CAO as making feedback about students’ “strengths, challenges, and progress an integral component of the educational experience.” Another described assessment as a way to change the status quo “with data rather than with rhetoric” (3). A chief student affairs officer sees assessment as linked to the university’s responsibility for stewardship. Finding out how well his program/unit is doing is part of being a “good steward of the limited resources that parents, students, and with a public institution, the state, were entrusting to me and my staff” (14).

Assessment is essentially about asking: “How are we doing?” Other related questions: “What are you trying to achieve? How are you doing? How do you know? What are you doing to improve?” (14).

Assessment is a way to give individual students feedback about their strengths and weaknesses, which helps them make determinations about their personal goals and progress. It can “attract and focus faculty and staff on the best ways to improve curriculum, instruction, and student services.” At the institutional level, it also provides “tangible evidence of progress toward strategic goals that can be used both internally and externally” (15).

12. “An Assessment Framework For the Community College Measuring Student Learning and Achievement as a Means of Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness.”
http://www.league.org/publication/whitepapers/0804.html

According to this white paper, “the assessment of student learning can generate data to support continuous improvement efforts necessary for documenting institutional effectiveness.”

This paper, while emphasizing the role of assessment at the community college level, uses the phrase “continuous improvement” throughout, often as a synecdoche for the assessment cycle described in earlier excerpts. The paper regularly refers to a process of continuous improvement, continuous improvement efforts, continuous improvement initiatives, institutional improvement, etc.


The phrase “authentic assessment” is relevant in particular to the claims made about the CLA to provide students with authentic assessment scenarios in their tests.
After Herman, Aschbacher and Winters the terms “alternative assessment” and “authentic assessment” are used here synonymously to mean “variants of performance assessments that require students to generate rather than choose a response” (2). Such assessment is seen as alternative to traditional testing (Barrett 2001) and authentic in the sense of testing a learner’s ability to carry out activities that resemble authentic situations (Elton and Johnston 2002, 40).


An interesting big-picture point about ways to think about assessing institutional effectiveness related to accreditation specifically, but makes sense with regard to assessment generally. They argue that student outcomes not be considered the only marker of educational quality.

**Distinguish quality based on student performance and institutional effectiveness.** A seventh challenge is to make certain that the multiple missions of the institution remain at the core of accreditation. At most institutions, some combination of teaching, research, and public service (also known as outreach, engagement) are supported. If student performance becomes too much the focus of defining quality in accreditation, the public good of the institution becomes redefined in terms of the private gain of the students. Higher education makes multiple contributions to our society, and they must be recognized in any evaluation of quality and integrity. Practically, a multiple perspectives strategy employing multiple indicators and measures of quality and effectiveness is required.