

ASSESSMENT: TERMINOLOGY AND FIRST STEPS



What is the Purpose of Assessment?

- Simply, to provide a systematic process through which faculty document their activities in defining student goals, measuring performance of students, and using the results to improve the educational program in which the student is enrolled.

Is Assessment New?

- NO... Dedicated faculty have always focused on student learning, performance, and the instructional program.
- The only new part is a more systemized and documented approach.

Terminology:

- “Assessment” Broadly defined, any type of measurement.
- “Student Learning Assessment”. Measurement focused entirely on student learning.
- “Student Learning Objectives” Based on the mission of the department and/or institution, a list of the things that should be learned by a student who successfully completes the instructional program.

“Program Level Assessment” vs. Individual Student Assessment

- Program Level Assessment answers this question: “Based upon measurement of student performance on the student learning goals, is the program itself successful in its educational goals?”
- Individual Student Assessment evaluated students one at a time.
- Program level assessment is much more valuable, and represents the national standard.

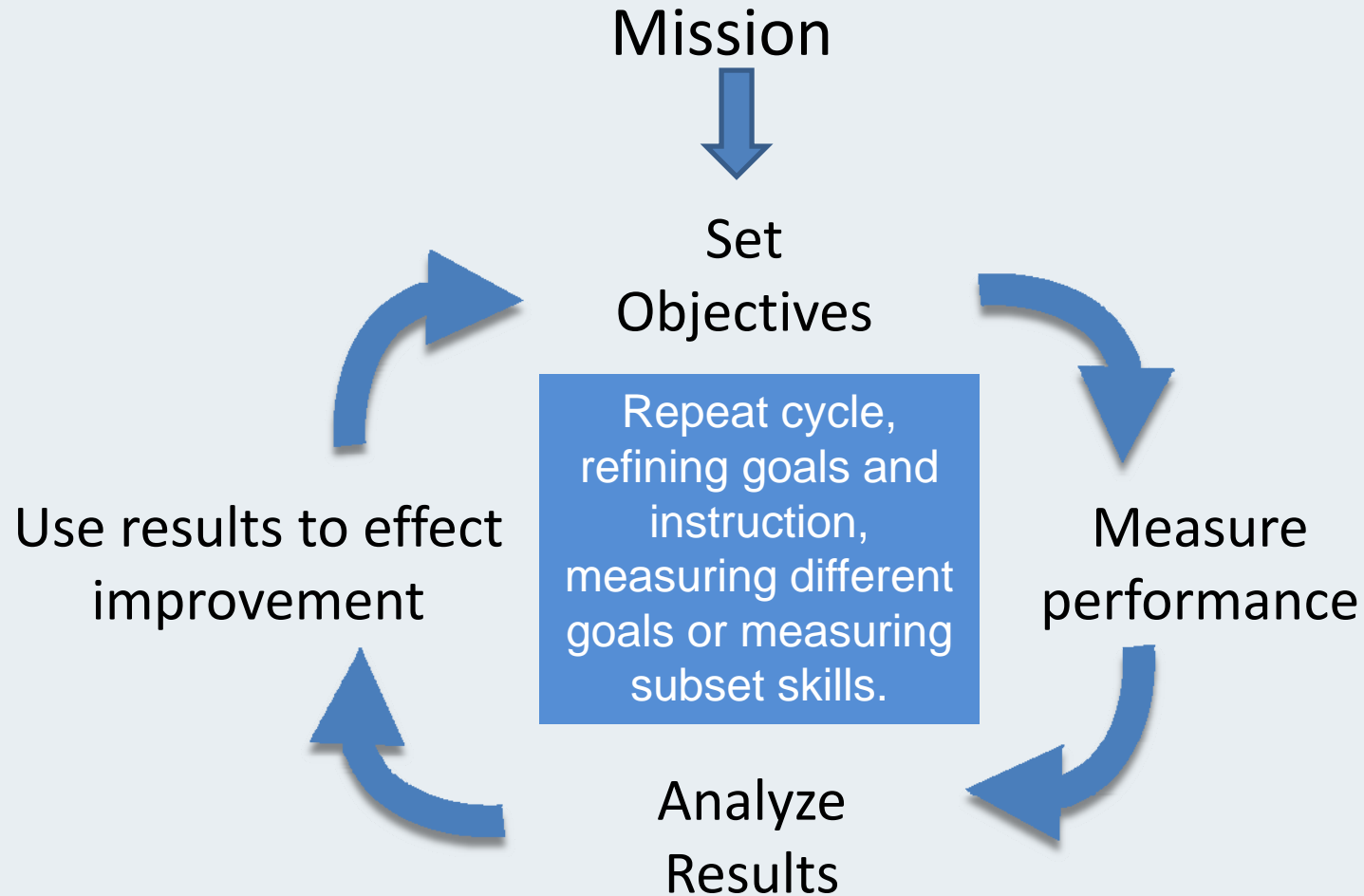
Venues for Assessment

- Classes
- Portfolios
- Projects and performances
- Capstone courses
- Course embedded assessment – assessment of broad skills, like writing, may be able to take place in any class where writing is involved.
- Special testing opportunities – challenging to arrange.

Best Practices:

- Direct observation of student performance on a specific skill or knowledge
- Measurable, detailed student learning goals
- Goals tied to curriculum
- Use of a single tool to measure multiple objectives, such as an essay question
- Use of sampling techniques
- Faculty discussion of results and action steps

The Student Learning Assessment Cycle:



The Student Learning Assessment Cycle:

- Using the Mission statement as an anchor:
- For each program (degree, major, minor) , ideally all instruction:
- Set (or review/revise) student learning objectives and performance goals
- Measure student performance on those objectives
- Analyze results of measuring; use results to inform improvement initiatives.
- Repeat cycle, refining goals and instruction, measuring different goals or measuring subset skills.

Common Pitfalls

- Letting the perfect be the enemy of the good
- Setting learning objectives that can not be observed.
- Defining more objectives than can be measured.
- Trying to evaluate every student's work instead of using a sampling technique
- Establishing an overly complex and unattainable assessment plan

Less Valuable tools for assessment

- Student grades on courses or multi-skill tests. The measure of performance is not specific enough.
- Teaching evaluations – really do not measure student learning.
- Surveys, unless unusually well-designed. Surveys usually measure perception, or self-perception, rather than actual performance.

A Word on Standardized Tests

- Standardized testing is neither all good, or all bad. Each possible instrument must be evaluated to see if it is of quality, if it provides deep and detailed information, and how well it fits the curriculum being offered.
- Standardized testing is not a mandatory part of student learning assessment, but can be incorporated if desired.

Recommendation:

Set attainable goals in assessment and carry them out: then build on that success to refine the process. Keep measuring, so progress and change can be seen over time