

Assessment Isn't a Four-letter Word

Barbara Rusher
Humanities Department Chair

Lisa Chapman
Dean, University Transfer and Public Services

Central Carolina Community College



Believe In The Value Of Assessment

Encourage Faculty To Believe In
The Value Of Assessment As An
Integral Component Of Student
Learning



Program Learning Outcome Assessment Plan

- Facilitate discussions with faculty regarding what they believe students need to know or be able to do
- Determine what you are already assessing
- Provide training on matching assessment with student learning outcome



Program Learning Outcome Assessment Plan

- Help faculty to develop assessment instruments
- Provide training and assistance in best practice as informed by assessment data
- Implement best practice
- Assess impact of implementation
- Facilitate discussions with faculty regarding what they believe students need to know or be able to do



Backward Design

- Identify desired outcomes
 - What do we want students to learn?
- Determine acceptable evidence of learning
 - How will we know that they have learned it?
- Plan learning experiences and instruction
 - How will we design the learning environment and process to attain our outcomes?



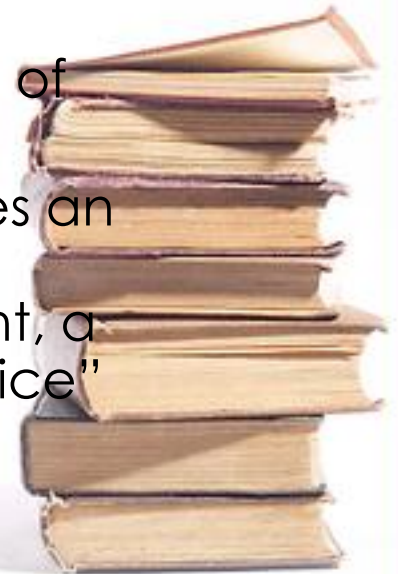
Alison McInnes and Yvette Daniel

University of Windsor, Ontario Canada

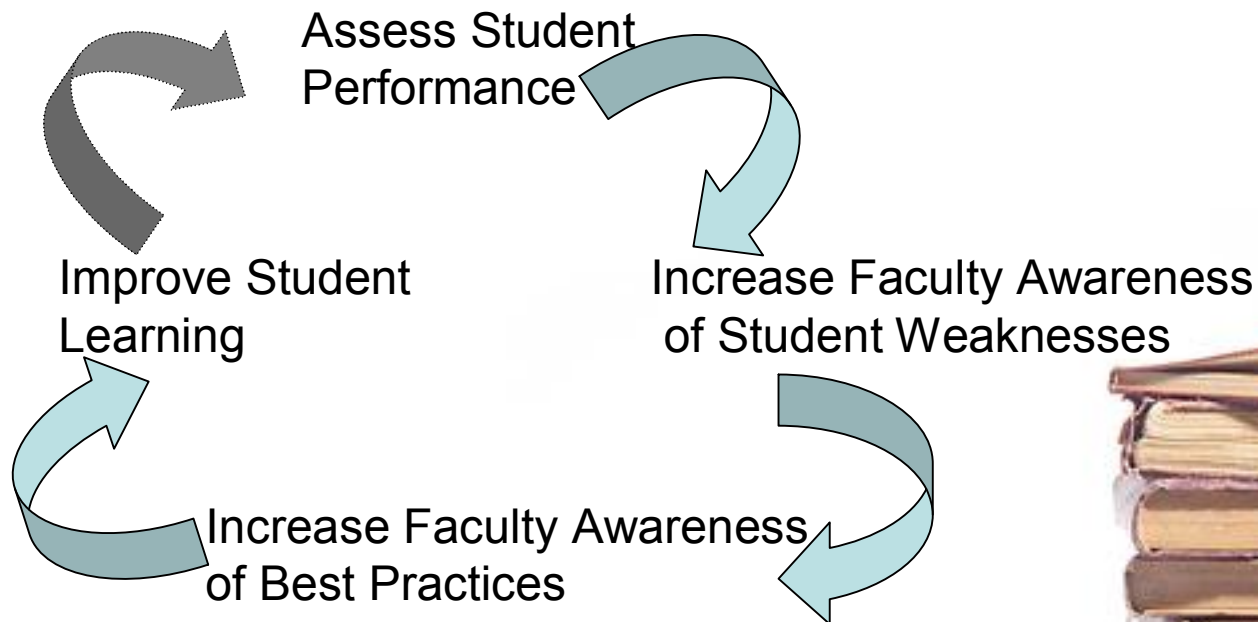
Five Assessment Principles

(Thomas Angelo & Patricia Cross 1993)

- To improve their teaching, faculty must define learning outcomes and measure their attainment
- To improve their learning, students must learn how to use feedback to assess their own progress (= “self-assessment”)
- The best assessment derives from teachers’ questions about their own teaching
- Systematic assessment can be an intellectually challenging source of faculty satisfaction
- Assessment provides an impetus for active student involvement, a proven “best practice”



Assessment Isn't a Four-letter Word



Center for Assessment and Improvement
of Learning at Tennessee Tech

<http://www.tntech.edu/cat/>

Assessment Isn't a Four-letter Word

.... But have we made it one... or
at least a four-word statement
that leaves a lot to be desired?



No

Child

Left

Behind



NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND---The Football Version

All teams must make the state playoffs and all **MUST** win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable. If after two years they have not won the championship their footballs and equipment will be taken away **UNTIL** they do win the championship.

It will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child gets left behind.

Spin on past Sec of Ed Rod Paige's football analogies regarding education
Mike DiMauro – suggested author



Report Produced by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education

- U.S. has taken its postsecondary superiority for granted
- Other countries are educating more of their citizens to more advanced levels than the U.S. is
- Higher Education must become
 - More accessible
 - More affordable
 - More accountable



Accountability

- Colleges and universities must embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement
- Accreditation, which has significant shortcomings, must make some changes
 - Reviews are typically kept private
 - Those that are public focus on process more than bottom line results
 - Overemphasis on reputation
 - Limited emphasis on measurable performance (student learning outcomes)



The response of Belle Wheelan, President of SACCS, to the report from the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education:

“Faculty are key players in any change that takes place in higher education...Federal mandates. . . do not ensure faculty “buy in” to requirements for change, but institutional success requires their commitment.”



One of the 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning:

- Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about
 - <http://www.iuk.edu/%7Ekoctla/assessment/9principles.shtml>



So what we are going to do is...well if you have a problem with ambiguity, you would have a problem with this process when they (SACS) started out. They knew what they had to do, but they did not know what to do. They knew the outcome, but they did not know how they were going to reach it. Well, if they knew the outcome, but didn't know how to reach it, and they were telling us....what do you think about us...well we had no idea how to reach it—no idea...so I think in looking back, if someone asked me about doing this again...and I did not have a gun to shoot myself, I would say give me the 435 MUST statements and by golly, I will get it done.



Comment from a faculty member at one of the NCCCS colleges

Must Have Faculty Buy In

- Regional accrediting agency – in an attempt not to be too prescriptive
 - May not have provided as much direction as some institutions needed
- But are we, as college leaders, providing any better direction?
 - Faculty may see assessment as additional work rather than an integral part of teaching and learning



In the world today, in community college, there tend to be more and more things to do—the tasks keep getting added on. It tumbles down from administrators, to department heads, to individual faculty.

We have got to do more with less— budget constraints. It is to the point that everyone –faculty, department heads, and me to my VP -- [everyone is saying,] “I can’t do anymore, and here you want me to assess something else.” So they see it possibly as another task.



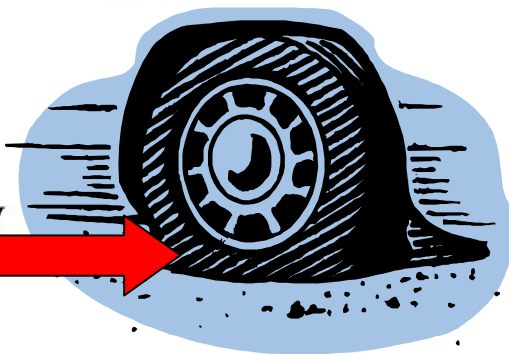
Comment from an administrator at one of the NCCCS colleges

Well the only difference – the only difference that I can see . . . is we did have to revise our way of doing the syllabi and, you know, our critical learning outcomes. In general for the liberal arts area, then putting on a specific learning outcome in humanities - which is what I teach--and spelling it out. There may be some way in which spelling out the learning outcomes has helped to be more specific, but honestly I was doing it anyway. . . . I have been talking to some of my colleagues up in my department, some of us who knew you were going to call.....and no one I talked to can tell any difference - we are just going about our merry way as usual - you know. . . .Other than the fact, again, I think people get irritated about the amount of time it takes to do this.



Comment from a faculty member at one of the NCCCS colleges

Entirely Reinvent the Wheel or
Assess and Build On What Is
Already Occurring???



We Made Assessing Student Learning More Difficult Than It Needed To Be

- Even though we started at a reasonable time in our preparation for *reaccreditation (that was the problem)*
 - *We tied assessment of learning to SACS*
 - *We needed data*
- We have data
 - *Through a lot of extra work, we asked good questions*
- We confused and frustrated the faculty



We Weren't The Only Ones. . .

I wish that there weren't such a disconnect with SACS. I think the new process is trying to get us to be better schools and give students better experiences, but there is always going to be that perception that it is the police coming. I just don't think of it that way. If you are doing the right thing, they are giving you guidelines for what the right thing is, you should say well whenever you want to drop by, we are here. And you wouldn't have to ramp up or do anything. You would just be ready. I am just such an optimist, but as a realist, I know that is not typically how it happens.

Comment from an administrator at one of the NCCCS colleges



What Were You Doing With Student Learning Outcomes Prior To Reaccreditation?

“Well at the college, it was a more vague approach, what we called them was objectives, So you had learning objectives in every syllabus and they were vague and not well constructed and the assessments were loosely connected to them so it seemed that people might be aware that they should be there, but there was no structure to make sure that they were there and all of that . . . In my class, I had your standard learning objectives, but I will admit, never had I been trained to word those properly so it was more like a laundry list of what I was going to cover.”

Comment from a faculty member at one of the NCCCS colleges



How Do You Define Student Learning Outcomes?

You mean how do I go about figuring out what they were? Well, they used to be called something else. Not outcomes, but . . .Competencies - that was it. I had those competencies to build from . . .

Everything I turned in passed muster. The wording was what changed. Instead of being a competency, it is an outcome now. . . You go in there and you take competency out and you put in outcome.

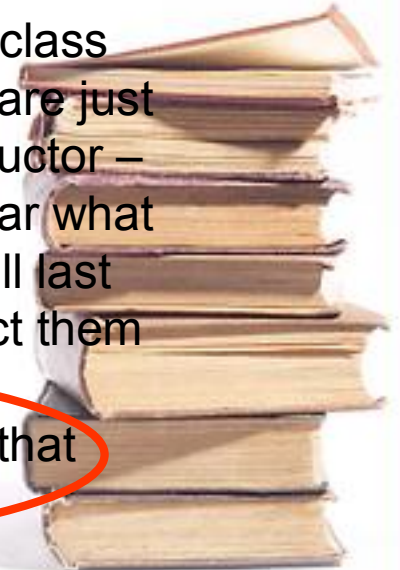


Comment from a faculty member at one of the NCCCS colleges

Do You Use Student Learning Outcomes In Your Courses?

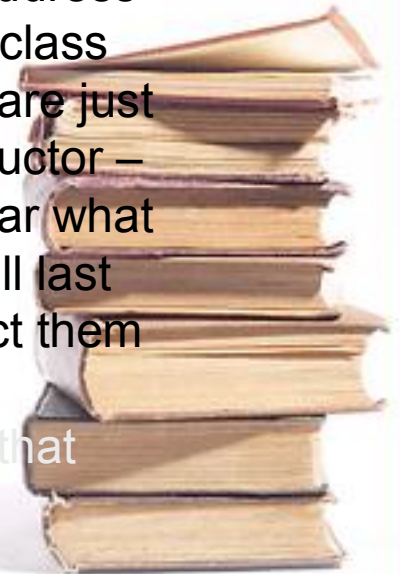
I would have to say – not really. I mean I believe the ideas are always in the back of my mind as to whether or not a student is proficient in the work that I am trying to train them to do. I always have that in the back of my mind and when I see that they are not proficient in an area we may go back. We do recap, revisit - you know a variety of ways of trying to address [them]. Some days you have students come in to your class and the whole group is just zoned out – you know they are just not ready to learn. And so you – I mean me as an instructor – I give them a certain quality of information. Like this year what is giving my students a problem did not affect them at all last year. The areas they are weak in this year did not affect them at all last year. So it's always a balance and as far as measuring the exact line by line item in the SACS stuff that has very little, to no impact there – in my classroom.

Continued. . .



Do You Use Student Learning Outcomes In Your Courses?

I would have to say – not really. I mean I believe the ideas are always in the back of my mind as to whether or not a student is proficient in the work that I am trying to train them to do. I always have that in the back of my mind and when I see that they are not proficient in an area we may go back. We do recap, revisit - you know a variety of ways of trying to address [them]. Some days you have students come in to your class and the whole group is just zoned out – you know they are just not ready to learn. And so you – I mean me as an instructor – I give them a certain quality of information. Like this year what is giving my students a problem did not affect them at all last year. The areas they are weak in this year did not affect them at all last year. So it's always a balance and as far as measuring the exact line by line item in the SACS stuff that has very little, to no impact there – in my classroom.



What Do You Do With That Information?

“... but if it is an area like for example you come up on a test or in a lab where you have to do the assignment, and they are unable to do it - well then I try to like take tests and evaluate where did most of the bulk of the class miss it. What is the area? Then, we've got to reserve as instructors - we've got to reserve enough time somehow to go back and focus on these areas.”

Continued . . .



Missing Piece

Did 'focusing in those areas'
make a difference??



Reinvent The Wheel Or Assess What Is Already Occurring . . .

- Do we already know what is important for our students to know and be able to do?
 - How do we know?
- What are we are already doing?
 - Is it effective?
 - How do we know?



Clarifying Assessment

- Define Assessment for Your College
 - CCCC
 - Measurement, analysis, and use of information by faculty, staff, and students to make effective decisions that enhance learning, teaching, and support services
- State Why Assessment is Important For Your College
 - CCCC
 - recognizes the value of information that is connected to issues or questions that people really care about in the process of improvement



Clarifying Assessment

<u>Dimension of Difference</u>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
<u>Timing</u>	Formative	Summative
<u>Relationship Between Administrator and Recipient</u>	Reflective	Prescriptive
<u>Findings, Uses Thereof</u>	Diagnostic	Judgmental

- Distinguish Between Assessment and Evaluation



Course Objectives

- Objectives describe skills, tools or content that students will master by the end of one course.
- Objectives require the use of basic thinking skills such as knowledge, comprehension and application.
- Objectives do not necessarily result in a product. Objectives are combined to produce something that measures outcomes.



Student Learning Outcomes

- Outcomes describe over-arching goals that students will be able to demonstrate by the end of a course or program.
- Outcomes require the use of higher level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students are asked to synthesize many discrete skills or areas of content.
- Outcomes result in a product that can be measured or assessed.



Program Level Outcome Statement

- *Should target key concepts or change points in program*
- *Should be clear with accomplishment ascertainable*
- *Should be singular*
- *Should be rotated when validated*



Guidelines For Establishing Program Level Outcomes

- Faculty brainstorm ideas related to student learning outcomes.
- Faculty prepare a long list of intended student learning outcomes.
- Faculty extract from the long list those learning outcomes that are considered as priorities for the current year.
- Faculty target three to five concepts per program.



Checklist for Evaluating Program Outcomes

- **Represent a fundamental result** of the course of study or program—does it assess what is most important?
- Clearly **describe what students are asked to do**, using action verbs
- Ask students to apply what they have learned by **producing something**?
- Include a **time frame** for students to accomplish this goal (end of second year, end of program)?
- Is the outcome **specific and measurable**?



Assessment

- Use clear and explicit language with action verbs
- Specify appropriate time frames
- Address both minimum standards and targets for excellence
- Designate responsibility for implementing assessment and for assuring appropriate use of assessment results.



Effective Program Assessment Should Answer These Questions

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How well are you doing it?
- How, using the answers to the first two questions, can you improve what you are doing?
- What and how does a program contribute to the development and growth of its students and/or the support of its customers?
- How can student learning be improved?

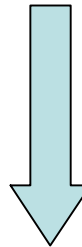


Simple Assessment Loop:

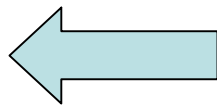
What is important
for your
students/graduates
to know and be
able to do?



How are you already assessing
that information?
--Can't all be after
graduation



What do
you do with
what you
learn?



How does
what you do
impact
learning?



Let's Practice . . .

- Groups
- Pick A Program
- Identify One / Two Program Learning Outcomes
- Specify One / Two Factors / Criteria OF An Assessment Instrument
- Present To Audience
- Evaluation
- Assessment



Recap

- Faculty Buy In
 - Purpose
 - Integral component of learning
 - Shared Ownership
 - Faculty-determined outcomes
 - What are faculty already assessing?
 - What do faculty consider important that they are not already assessing?
 - Administrative participation
 - Training
 - Incorporate into the learning process, not simply an add-on to produce data



CCCC's Efforts To Learn More About Assessment

- Two Events in the Spring
 - Open to all NCCCS educators
 - National Experts on Assessment
 - Emphasis on assessment in vocational / technical programs
- Assessment Newsletter
 - to be distributed next month
 - Invite submissions from all colleges
 - Assessment efforts and initiatives
 - assess@cccc.edu (10/26)

