

# Assessment 101 Guide



Very often what we need to document for assessment is the good work we are already doing. However, it can still be daunting deciding where to begin. Keeping in mind that the process should be meaningful and manageable can make all the difference.

## WHY ASSESS?

- Internal desire to improve
- External factors such as accreditation and calls for accountability
- Fits with other initiatives:
  - ✓ Strategic Planning
  - ✓ General Education
  - ✓ Program Review
  - ✓ State requirements
  - ✓ Grants
  - ✓ Curriculum Mapping



## ASSESSMENT TIPS

### 1 LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

- Find and use the language that fits your campus culture. Listen to the language faculty use in their discipline.
- De-emphasize the word assessment; instead, talk about improving or enhancing learning and teaching. Talk about sustaining excellence.

“Instead of using the ‘A’ word [Assessment], I just talk to my faculty about getting better at preparing our students.”

### 2 ASSESSMENT IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

- Emphasize the importance of each step of the process.
- De-emphasize assessment reports as the culminating experience.

“If nothing else comes of this assessment work, the experience of our entire faculty discussing together learning outcomes for our graduates was an amazing benefit.”

## TIPS FOR WRITING MISSION STATEMENTS

- Written to be specific and distinctive, mission statements address the purpose and significance of the entity’s work.
- Articulate alignment with the division/institution’s mission.
- Lead to the identification of the entity’s goals/outcomes.

## TIPS FOR WRITING GOALS

- Broad statements about the desired end to which a unit or program aspires - more about the destination than the path.
- Provide a bridge between the mission/purpose statement and the specific outcomes/objectives.



## OUTCOMES

- Align to the entity's mission (and goals, if used).
- Be aspirational yet realistic, and attainable.
- Have the three "m"s: manageable in number, measurable and/or observable, and meaningful.
- Identify knowledge, skills, and abilities students should gain or improve.
- Detail what the end result will be, not the experience.
- Indicate an observable, measurable manifestation of the outcome.
- Not to include more than one item each (avoid using "and").



## 3 DEMYSTIFY THE TOPIC

- Talk with folks about assessment being a way of knowing and understanding the effectiveness of our students' experiences with us.
- Emphasize essential questions faculty should be constantly thinking about:
- How do we know that our students have learned what we have taught?
- How do we know for sure that our students are prepared for the next stages of their lives?
- These are the questions assessment helps us to answer.

"Assessment is really about paying attention to the curriculum."

## ASSESSMENT TIPS

### 4 TIE YOUR ASSESSMENT WORK TO OTHER INITIATIVES

- Emphasize we don't do assessment solely for accreditation purposes.
- Connections to other initiatives:
  - ✓ Strategic planning
  - ✓ General education
  - ✓ Program review
  - ✓ State requirements/reports
  - ✓ Grants
  - ✓ Curriculum planning

### 5 IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Check out the work of Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*.
- What depth of understanding should outcomes be? Knowledge students should find worth being familiar with.
- Knowledge and skills that are important to know and do in a discipline.
- Knowledge that is considered "enduring" understanding.

## TIPS FOR WRITING MEASURES

- Include both types (direct and indirect) and focus on direct measures.
- Use multiple measures for each outcome.
- Choose measures in your area of control.
- Look at what's already being done that you can use.
- Be realistic so that collection is not a burden.
- Be written so they are easily distinguishable from Outcomes and Targets.

## TIPS FOR WRITING FINDINGS

- Provide enough details and interpretation to illustrate to what degree the target has been met.
- Touch on the significance of the results.

## TIPS FOR WRITING ACTION PLANS

- Consider what can be improved, changed, or monitored.
- Detail specific actions that can be taken for the next cycle (include details about what will be done, by whom, by when, etc). Be relevant, appropriate, and manageable.



## 6 WRITE EFFECTIVE ACTION PLANS

- Consider the level of the action: need to be improved, changed, or monitored.
- Detail specific actions to be taken including info on what will be done, by whom, by when, etc.
- Be sure to measure again after the change has been made.

## 7 JOIN A GROUP OF ASSESSMENT COLLEAGUES

- Contact other assessment professionals in your region about a monthly virtual get-together to share frustrations and ideas. Visit each others' campuses.
- State orgs such as Va. Assessment Group.
- ASSESS and ACCSHE listservs offer a great resource.

“This listserv has been a life-saver for me as I have maneuvered my way through the 5th Year report to SACSCOC.”

## ASSESSMENT TIPS

### 8 ASSESS THE ASSESSMENT PLAN

- Is the assessment plan structured to yield information that is meaningful for improvement?
- Is the plan manageable? Do you have adequate resources for accomplishing what you have planned?
- Is the plan clear and easy to understand by all stakeholders?

### 9 DEVELOP YOUR ASSESSMENT OFFICE INTO AN ENTERPRISE

- Become good friends and colleagues with your grants management office. Talk about mutually beneficial opportunities you might pursue.
- Offer your evaluation services to programs and departments as they seek and implement grants.

“We moved from an office of 2 to an office of 3 plus 2 full-time grad assistants...”

## ASSESSING THE ASSESSMENT

- Is the assessment plan structured to yield information meaningful for improvement?
- Is the plan manageable? Are there adequate resources for accomplishing what it lays out?
- Does the plan account for how it will be carried out?
- Is the plan and report clear and easy to understand?

## GENERAL TIPS

- Remember Linda Suskie - good assessment is used, cost effective, accurate, and meaningful.
- Start and end with genuine aspirations.
- No need to reinvent the wheel - use what's there.
- Be realistic regarding resources; prioritize and budget time wisely.
- Be deliberate while writing (saves time later).
- Be flexible—there will be surprises along the way.

# Did you enjoy the Assessment 101 Guide?

If you have any feedback, comments or suggestions, please get in touch by emailing Amber Malinovsky, Weave's Director of Interactive Content at [amber@weaveeducation.com](mailto:amber@weaveeducation.com).

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