

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Assessment?

A: Assessment is:

- Establishing *clear measurable objectives for expected student learning outcomes*;
- Providing students with *the opportunity to learn* and achieve the expected learning outcomes;
- *Systematically gathering evidence/data* on whether students are actually achieving the expected outcomes;
- *Using the gathered evidence to understand and improve student learning.*



Q: How can student learning be assessed?

A: Student Learning can be assessed by using authentic direct assessments about what students can do and what they know and, less effectively, with indirect assessments (e.g., beliefs and surveys about what students think they have learned or instructors beliefs about what they think students know or can do). Besides tests, research and creative papers, students can be assessed with actual performance (e.g., in the classroom, in the theatre, in a real or simulated patient's room, and in the lab). Portfolios of actual student work (e.g., lab reports, art work, research papers) can also be used for assessment.

Q: What is good assessment?

A: **Good assessment** (like in S. Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*):

- Begins with the end in mind (i.e., established goals and expected student learning outcomes);
- Performs "first things first" (i.e., organizes learning opportunities to emphasize student learning outcomes);
- Required "proactive" intentional goal setting;
- Requires constant renewal (i.e., focuses on continuous improvement in student learning);
- Linda Suskie argues that good assessment is characterized by five dimensions and they: are used; are cost effective; yield reasonable accurate and truthful results; are valued; focus on and flow from clear and important goals (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Nov. 1, 2006).

Q: What is meant by "authentic assessment"?

A: **Authentic assessment directly examines student performance** on a full-array of important tasks that students need to know, be able to do in applied settings beyond the testing environment. For example, students need to have written and oral communication skills and quantitative analytic skills. Authentic assessment asks students to use and apply theoretical knowledge in "real world" situations. For example, it

is difficult to completely assess a potential teacher of mathematics' skill by using only a paper and pencil (or computerized) test or a student's ability to write with a multiple choice test.

Q: How does grading differ from assessment?

A: **Grading is not the same as assessment.** Grading alone does not provide information about what a student does or does not know or what skills they have. Grading criteria may be unclear or even inconsistently applied. Assessment should identify more precisely students and classes' strengths and weaknesses so that an instructor can use the information to modify instruction and help students improve student learning.

Q: How does assessment differ from accountability?

A: **Assessment and Accountability are different and have different goals.** Assessment evaluates student learning in degree programs and ancillary services with the goal of improving student learning outcomes. Accountability evaluates institutional processes and programs (e.g., retention rates in academic programs and the institution, graduation rates, failure rates, student learning) with the goal of demonstrating effectiveness to internal and external stakeholders such as the state, national government, or accreditation organizations (e.g., SACS).

Q: How does assessment help students?

A: **Assessment**, if properly done, helps students by identifying what they are and are not learning so that instruction can be modified to improve student learning. Students can prepare better if they know the criteria that will be used to evaluate their work. Moreover, students learn more efficiently with specific feedback, allowing them to focus on areas of learning that need improvement.

Q: How does assessment help faculty?

A: **Assessment helps faculty by:** assisting them in organizing their classes around clear objectives. Assessment provided faculty with evidence as to what students are learning and how the faculty member might modify the class in order to improve student learning outcomes.

Q: What does assessment have to do with accreditation?

A: **Assessment and accreditation are related activities.** Accreditation requires that we do assessment and systematically gather evidence about student learning outcomes and that we demonstrate how we are using data to improve student learning. However, we do not simply do assessment for external stakeholders. As professionals interested in pedagogy and student learning outcomes, we do assessment so that we can improve student learning outcomes.

Q: What is a rubric and why is it useful to both faculty and students?

A: **A rubric is a grading guide, a specific set of grading criteria.** You may already be using a rubric, but not calling it a rubric. A rubric can help faculty speed up the grading process and even help them develop assignments and classroom activities. A rubric that is shared with students can help them successfully respond to an assignment. Rubrics help students focus on the criteria faculty consider most important and thus perform better on the assignments.