Texas A&M University-San Antonio
Assessment Terminology
Division of Student Success and Engagement

Terms	Definitions	Citation
Action Plan	The actions the program/department is taking in response to the assessment in an attempt to make improvements. Typical action plans include goals, assigned tasks, and deadlines.	
Assessment	"Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards, and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performance."(Angelo, 1995) "Assessment is any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness."(Upcraft and Schuh, 2001)"Assessment is the process of providing credible evidence of resources, implementation actions, and outcomes undertaken for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of instruction, programs, and services."(Banta & Palomba, 2015)	Cited in definition
Assessment Plan	A tool used to document/record the process of assessment as well as the results or product of the assessment.	
Benchmark	An internal or external standard used to compare assessment findings. The measurement of individual or group performance against an established standard.	University of Texas- El Paso
Closing the Loop	Using assessment results to inform program changes or improvements is perhaps the most challenging final step in the assessment cycle – commonly referred to as 'closing the loop'.	California Polytechnic State University
Cohort	A group whose progress is followed by means of measurements at different points in time.	University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Culture of Assessment	A culture of assessment in student affairs is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of data collection and analysis that informs decision-making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization (Leary, 2018).	Cited in definition

Data Analysis	The process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe/illustrate, condense/recap, and evaluate data.	Northern Illinois University
Data Collection	The process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes.	Northern Illinois University
Direct Method	A direct method of collecting information require the students to display their knowledge and skills. Direct measures of learning are usually accomplished through assessment methods such as "quiz" type survey, rubric, document analysis, observation, portfolio, visual methods, one-minute assessment, and/or case study	Applying & Leading Assessment
Evaluation	"Evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process." (Scriven, 1999) Any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional, or institutional effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).	Cited in definition
Focus Groups	A collective group of participants assembled to provide their perspectives or feedback towards a specific subject or product. These can be especially valuable to use when creating surveys or to follow-up on surveys or interviews. Themes can be identified within the data in order to easily summarize the feedback. Effective focus groups are carefully planned group discussions conducted by trained moderators. Focus groups are ideal when you are looking to find consensus or group agreement on a particular topic. They are also more resource-friendly than interviews.	University of Nebraska Kearney and University of Texas – El Paso
Formative Assessment	Formative assessment occurs as a program or activity is happening. Students might give student affairs practitioners' feedback on how the front end of a program is meeting their needs and encouraging their growth. If there are areas that can be changed and improved in a relatively efficient manner, this assessment information can serve to make the outcome of the program better catered to the student population it is serving in real time. Pro: These assessments allow us to understand how the program is meeting the goal outcomes as the program is developing, which allows practitioners to change programming in an effective manner to cater to the needs of the current student population. Con: Many programs cannot be easily changed in a short period of time, so these assessments may not be as relevant to large-scale projects that would take a long time to change.	Applying & Leading Assessment
Goals	Broad, general statements of what the program or service intends to accomplish. Goals should provide a framework for determining the more specific educational objectives of a program, and should be consistent with the mission of the program and the mission of the institution.	Clemson University

Indirect Method	Indirect methods require that students or someone else to reflect student learning, behavior, and attitudes rather than to demonstrate it. Indirect measures of learning are usually accomplished through assessment methods such as surveys or collecting feedback from faculty/staff about students.	Applying & Leading Assessment
Interview	A data collection procedure in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another (a respondent). Interviews can be assessed through the use of criteria checklists, rubrics, and note taking (where themes are later identified). Short quizzes or surveys could be administered following an interview to incorporate quantitative measurements.	Weber State University
Journaling/Student Reflections	A practice of reflective writing where the student records their thoughts and feelings. Journaling can also be directed by guiding questions. Student reflections can be used to identify themes in students' self-reported learning. Rubrics can also be used to assign numerical value to outcomes being measured by the reflection.	Weber State University and Clemson University
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Key Performance Indicators are metrics that track the performance of tasks critical to attaining important objectives in a time-sensitive manner. They help gauge the effectiveness of various functions and processes important to achieving organizational goals. For example, one key performance indicator of fall orientation could be fall course registration, or tracking the number of students who register successfully for at least one fall term course.	University of Texas – El Paso
Method of Assessment	Method of assessment highlights the way(s) in which the learning outcome will be measured (i.e. survey, focus group, interview, etc.). Multiple methods will yield richer data.	Clemson University
Mission Statement	A formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual. A holistic vision of the values and philosophy of a department, program, unit or institution. The central purpose that provides focus, direction and destination for our work. It describes the purpose of our organization, who we serve, and our hopes. It is the "big picture of what we currently do" and why we exist.	University of Texas – El Paso
Mixed Methods	Mixed methods are procedures for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study.	Clemson University
Objectives	Objectives are concrete ways goals are met through program processes and student learning and development. They will describe what the program will do or what the student is to do. Objectives are often written more in terms of teaching intentions and typically indicate the subject content that the teacher(s) intend to cover.	Clemson University
Observations	Observations allow you to actually see students demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes. Observations can be measured through the use of rubrics, checklists, or note taking.	Weber State University

Outcomes	Outcomes essentially take an objective and bound it to a place, time, group of participants, and a level for performance. Outcomes are specifically about what you want the end result of your efforts to be, the changes you want to occur. Learning outcomes are changes in students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that result from involvement in a program or activity. It describes what you want the student to know and do. Program outcomes, on the other hand, are the changes you want to see in programs and services. Outcomes are statements of what you will assess.	Clemson University
Performance-Based Assessment	Direct, systematic observation and rating of an individual's performance, often an ongoing observation over a period of time, and typically involving the creation of products. The assessment should be a real-world performance with relevance to the learning process. Assessment of the performance is done using a rubric or analytic scoring guide to aid in objectivity. Performance-based assessment is a test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting.	University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Population	A group of individuals or entities from which a sample is drawn or about which a conclusion is stated.	Clemson University
Portfolio Assessment	A type of direct measure, a performance measure, in which students' assignments are carefully reviewed for evidence of desired learning outcomes. The portfolios contain work selected over a period of time, with materials added as the student progresses through the course/program. In addition, the portfolios usually include students' reflective learning/outcome analysis.	University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Posttest	Assessment of an individual's command of knowledge or skills following a learning experience. A pretest typically precedes this for comparison to determine if there was an acquisition of knowledge or skill.	Clemson University
Pretest	Assessment of an individual's command of knowledge or skills preceding a learning experience. A posttest typically follows for comparison to determine if there was an acquisition of knowledge or skill.	Clemson University
Qualitative Method	Qualitative assessment methodology is primarily characterized by words and descriptions. Examples include observations, focus groups, interviews, student reflections, case studies, portfolios, and open-ended questions	Clemson University
Quantitative Method	Quantitative assessment methodology is primarily characterized by the use of numbers. Examples include pre/posttests and surveys.	Clemson University
Random Sampling	A sampling method in which each participant or element has an equal chance of being selected for inclusion in a study.	Clemson University
Reliability	The measure of consistency for an assessment instrument. The instrument should yield similar results over time with similar populations in similar circumstances.	University of Wisconsin

		– Stevens Point
Research	Differs from assessment in that it guides theory development, tests concepts, and has implications that extend beyond a single institution. The role of the research investigator is to describe what has been done. In contrast, assessment guides good practice; its implications can rarely be generalized beyond a single institution; and the assessment investigator's role is not only to describe what has been done but what should be done given the findings of the study (Upcraft & Schuh, 2001).	Cited in definition
Response Rate	The rate of completion or return; the number of participants that completed the study divided by the number in the sampled population.	Clemson University
Rubric	A rubric is a scoring tool used to assess student learning. Using a set of criteria and standards (directly tied to the stated learning objectives), educators can assess each student's performance on a wide variety of work, ranging from written essays to group projects. When a rubric is agreed-upon and communicated prior to the student's work being completed, the grading process is very clear and transparent to all involved. Often, it is helpful to have more than one evaluator grade each piece of work. Then the rubric scores can either be averaged or added together for a final score.	Clemson University
Sampling	A sample is a subgroup of a population selected to participate in an activity, program or service. The assessment results from the sample are used to generalize to the larger population from which the sample was drawn.	Clemson University
Summative Assessment	Summative assessment occurs after a program or activity has concluded. Many student affairs assessment projects are summative assessments. In this manner, students experience the entirety of a program and then give their feedback or demonstrate their learning in order to inform future practice.	Applying & Leading Assessment
Survey/Questionnaire	A survey or questionnaire is a document containing questions and other types of items designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis. Surveys can be paper or electronic and are used to collect data from many people quickly and easily.	University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point and Clemson University
Triangulation	The collection of data via multiple methods in order to determine if the results show a consistent outcome.	University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Validity	The test measures the desired performance and appropriate inferences can be drawn from the results. The assessment accurately reflects the learning it was designed to measure.	University of Wisconsin

		– Stevens Point
Vision Statement	A Vision Statement clarifies what the institution should look like and how it should behave as it fulfills its mission.	University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point

Citations

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University of Nebraska Kearney Division of Academic and Student Affairs Glossary of Terms online at http://www.unk.edu/academic_affairs/assessment/glossary.php

University of Texas at El Paso Division of Student Affairs Glossary at https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/assessment/glossary.html

University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Division of Student Affairs Glossary of Terms online at http://uwm.edu/saassessment/toolkit/vocabulary/

University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Division of Student Affairs Glossary of Terms online at https://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/SAATGLOSSARY.pdf

Weber State University Introduction to Student Learning Outcomes Assessment online at
http://www.weber.edu/SAAssessment/SSA_CreatingEval_Outcomes.html