

Chapter 6. Implementing Assessment

Thus far this Handbook has asked faculty to engage in important assessment work that is essentially preparatory in nature. The time has come to think about actually implementing outcomes assessment. To do so programs are asked to consider using the following six-step approach.

- Step 1:** Pick a goal that deserves attention based on faculty deliberation. In some instances, faculty might have to work on a less deserving goal and put one or two important goals on the back burner until the timing is right.
- Step 2:** After deciding on a target goal, apply appropriate assessment methods for a specific outcome and then collect and analyze data. This step, of course, is labor intensive and time consuming. More and more departments are turning over this step to a small group of members who in turn will do the actual analysis and then report the findings to the department for consultation.
- Step 3:** Deliberate some recommendation to change or modify the curriculum that will lead to program improvement. This feedback loop is essential in all assessment plans.
- Step 4:** Submit assessment results and curriculum plans to OIRA using the [Annual Report format](#).
- Step 5:** Review the evaluation of your Annual Report by OIRA. Bring any comments or concerns you may have to OIRA's Director.
- Step 6:** Once the annual Report is evaluated by OIRA, departments should implement assessment strategies. When initial program feedback from assessment practices becomes available, departments should use the results for programmatic improvement or to revise objectives or plans, if necessary.

By following this six-step process, the complexities associated with developing effective and efficient assessment plans, especially for those devising assessment strategies for the first time, can be made less arduous and time consuming. As programs gain more assessment experience, faculty will become more adept at using the more helpful methods for measuring student work. The development of this handbook is one effort to assist this cooperative learning effort.

Other Implementation Issues

Before concluding this chapter, faculty might want to look at a few more issues that concern the implementation process.

1) Sampling Method and Sample Size. In thinking how evidence of student work will be collected, and how much evidence will be used for assessment, faculty also need to determine how many students will have their work sampled, and from which courses or tests evidence will be extracted. Cost and time are major issues, so the more work you collect for analysis, the greater the implementation cost. Use a manageable, if small, sample size so as to make assessment realistic.

2) Rubrics. As suggested above, all too often faculty do not make explicit the criteria

they use to evaluate student work in complex projects that are not easily quantifiable. These kinds of projects include writing, oral communication, critical thinking, or information literacy, which are just a few objectives that every college program now incorporates into their curriculum. Too often, however, the selection of an assessment tool does not, by itself, specify the parameters of the assessment tool. For example, the use of student writing in a capstone project to assess research skills or argument development often leaves unstated how the judgments about this area will be made from this assignment. To help rectify this serious shortcoming of not having explicit criteria, faculty should ask what specific traits in writing exhibit evidence of good, bad, or indifferent critical thinking. This process of isolating the traits for evaluation purposes is called rubric grading, which the assessment practitioners urge faculty to consider using.

A rubric is a set of criteria for assessing student work or performance. Rubrics have two dimensions: they identify the various characteristics of the outcome, and they specify various levels of achievement in each characteristic. Thus, a well-designed rubric consists of 1) clear definitions of each characteristic to be assessed for a given learning outcome, and 2) clear descriptions of the different levels of achievement for each characteristic. For example, to assess writing requires a set of characteristics of writing that are being examined (e.g., exigency, discernable purpose, supporting quotes) and a set of levels indicating the quality evident in those characteristics (e.g. what constitutes excellent, good, fair, or poor logical organization). Because rubrics list explicit criteria, they make assessment more transparent, consistent, and objective, which in turn can be communicated to students who gain an understanding of what is expected and how their performance will be assessed.

3. Resources. In order to do assessment, faculty need to consider the material cost of resources in total. Most schools that have a strong assessment plan in place also have varying systems of financial support for the program. Even so, faculty need to continue to consider the cost of different assessment strategies such as standardized tests, and surveys, which, for example, includes the design of the survey, mailings, web-based postings, e-mail, and compilation of the results. Another cost to consider is the time and cost of collecting and evaluating student work. For example, some administrators are unaware that the estimate for scoring 20 pages of student writing is about an hour, and that is only after faculty acquire some proficiency in applying rubrics. For larger programs requiring complex assessment tools, it may be necessary to assign a faculty member the ongoing task of assessment coordinator.