



Glossary of Assessment Terms

Action Plan

A plan of action developed for the purpose of improving student learning based upon assessment data. Action plans are normally developed during the analysis of assessment data and directly related to the findings thereof.

Artifact

An object produced to indicate mastery of a skill or component of knowledge. It is often stored for future use.

Assessment

The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.

Assessment findings

Referred to in Taskstream as the qualitative and/or quantitative summation of the data collected from the assessment tool.

Assessment Management System (AMS)

Software designed to be a repository for assessment information. The ams employed by A-State is Taskstream.

Assessment Plan

A plan for assessing learning in a program. It generally includes program-level student learning outcomes, measures, venue for the assessment measures, timeline, and responsible parties. At A-State an assessment plan generally spans a four year cycle.

Assessment Tool

Instrument used to measure the characteristic or outcome of interest. It is the tool used to implement part of a larger assessment plan. Example: assessment tools for learning include classroom assessment techniques (minute paper, muddiest point, etc.), capstone projects, examinations, portfolio entries, or student performances.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives

Six levels arranged in order of increasing complexity (1=low, 6=high):

1. Knowledge: Recalling or remembering information without necessarily understanding it. Includes behaviors such as describing, listing, identifying, and labeling.
2. Comprehension: Understanding learned material and includes behaviors such as explaining, discussing, and interpreting.
3. Application: The ability to put ideas and concepts to work in solving problems. It includes behaviors such as demonstrating, showing, and making use of information.
4. Analysis: Breaking down information into its component parts to see interrelationships and ideas. Related behaviors include differentiating, comparing, and categorizing.
5. Synthesis: The ability to put parts together to form something original. It involves using creativity to compose or design something new.
6. Evaluation: Judging the value of evidence based on definite criteria. Behaviors related to evaluation include: concluding, criticizing, prioritizing, and recommending.

Classroom Assessment

The systematic and on-going study of what and how students are learning in a particular classroom; often designed for individual faculty who wish to improve their teaching of a specific course. Classroom assessment differs from tests and other forms of student assessment in that it is aimed at course improvement, rather than at assigning grades.

Closing the Loop

Closing the loop refers to the use of assessment results to improve student learning through collegial dialog informed by the results of learning outcome assessment. It is part of the continuous cycle of collecting assessment results, evaluating them, using the evaluations to identify actions that will improve student learning, implementing those actions, and then cycling back to collecting assessment results.

Curriculum Map

A matrix that connects goals or objectives to any courses within a particular discipline that allow for achievement of the goals/objectives; it is an auditing tool that helps identify potential gaps in the curriculum.

Descriptive Statistics

Summative methods to depict the data in succinct ways. Some examples of descriptive statistics are: mean, median, mode, average, range, standard deviation, variance etc.

Direct Assessment

Gathers evidence about student learning based on student performance that demonstrates the learning itself. Can be value added, related to standards, qualitative or quantitative, embedded or not, using local or external criteria. Examples are written assignments, classroom assignments, presentations, test results, projects, logs, portfolios, and direct observations.

Embedded Assessment

A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process. Often uses for assessment purposes classroom assignments that are evaluated to assign students a grade. Can assess individual student performance or aggregate the information to provide information about the course or program; can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative. Example: as part of a course, expecting each senior to complete a research paper that is graded for content and style, but is also assessed for advanced ability to locate and evaluate Web-based information (as part of a college-wide outcome to demonstrate information literacy).

Formative Assessment

The gathering of information about student learning-during the progression of a course or program and usually repeatedly-to improve the learning of those students. Example: reading the first lab reports of a class to assess whether some or all students in the group need a lesson on how to make them succinct and informative.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

The body within the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools with the legal authority to confer accreditation upon higher education member institutions.

Indirect Assessment

Acquiring evidence about how students feel about learning and their learning environment rather than actual demonstrations of outcome achievement. Examples include surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and reflective essays.

Inter-rater Reliability

Refers to statistical measurements that determine how similar the data collected by different raters are. A rater is someone who is scoring or measuring a performance, behavior, or skill in a human or animal.

Learning Outcomes

Operational statements describing specific student behaviors that evidence the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes or dispositions. Learning outcomes can be usefully thought of as behavioral criteria for determining whether students are achieving the educational objectives of a program, and, ultimately, whether overall program goals are being successfully met. Outcomes are sometimes treated as synonymous with objectives, though objectives

are usually more general statements of what students are expected to achieve in an academic program.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA)

The largest of the six regional accreditors within the US. The north central region covers 19 states, from Ohio to Arizona. This accreditor has two arms: one which accredits k-12 education; the other, the HLC, which accredits higher education institutions.

Performance-Based Assessment

A type of student evaluation that requires a student to perform a task and be evaluated using indicators/criteria for performance (rather than traditional testing methods such as selecting an answer from an existing list).

Portfolio

Compilation of evidence demonstrating a level of development of essential competencies and the achievement of specific learning outcomes. The portfolio serves as a tool for both formative and summative assessment. A portfolio is a repository of professional and/or academic work.

Program

The term “program” refers to a degree or certificate offered by the college.

Program Review

A comprehensive review of the effectiveness of a program that is conducted on a regular cycle. Assessment of student learning is one important component of Program Review, but the focus of Program Review is broader, including review of enrollment data, job placement or transfer success, and facilities.

Rubric

Specific sets of criteria that clearly define for both student and teacher what a range of acceptable and unacceptable performance looks like. Criteria define descriptors of ability at each level of performance and assign values to each level. Levels referred to are proficiency levels, which describe a continuum from excellent to unacceptable product.

Status Report

Referred to in Taskstream; details the results of the action plan delineated by a program in the previous assessment cycle. The status report, to be completed annually, details how the action plan from the previous assessment cycle impacted the program/student learning.

Summative Assessment

The gathering of information at the conclusion of a course, program, or undergraduate career to improve learning or to meet accountability demands. When used for improvement, impacts the next cohort of students taking the course or

program. Example: examining student final exams in a course to see if certain specific areas of the curriculum were understood less well than others.

Taskstream

The assessment management system (ams) employed by A-State used as a repository for assessment information.

Value Added

The increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or undergraduate education. Can either focus on the individual student (how much better a student can write, for example, at the end than at the beginning) or on a cohort of students (whether senior papers demonstrate more sophisticated writing skills-in the aggregate-than freshmen papers). Requires a baseline measurement for comparison.

Some definitions were adapted from the following sources:

Butte College

Clark College

College of Southern Nevada

National Teaching & Learning Forum

Palomba, C. & Banta, T. (1999). *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

System for Adult Basic Education Support

Utah Valley University