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ABSTRACT

Developed by members of the Student Outcomes Assessment Committee at College of DuPage (Illinois), this booklet addresses various issues on student assessment. Assessment is a repeating cycle of basic actions. The organizers plan and define the outcomes or expectations and make them public. The organizers also assess the success of the action in attaining the expected outcomes and identify any relevant concerns. Outcomes assessment processes and cycles occur throughout the institution from classroom to college-wide strategic planning. In the classroom, a faculty member may use classroom-assessment-techniques (CATs) to gather feedback about a single lecture/discussion, to examine students' grasp of key concepts and issues in the discipline, or to solicit students' self-reflective assessments of their progress in a particular unit of study. Widening the scope of assessment to include multiple-section, discipline, and program assessment involves extensive collaboration. Continuing to widen the scope of assessment leads to the processes that involve multiple units, disciplines, and programs at the college. Many of these institution-wide processes are expressed in the college's mission. Assessments should focus on documenting effective changes as the result of activities and make use of multiple measure of outcomes to assure reliability and validity. (JA)

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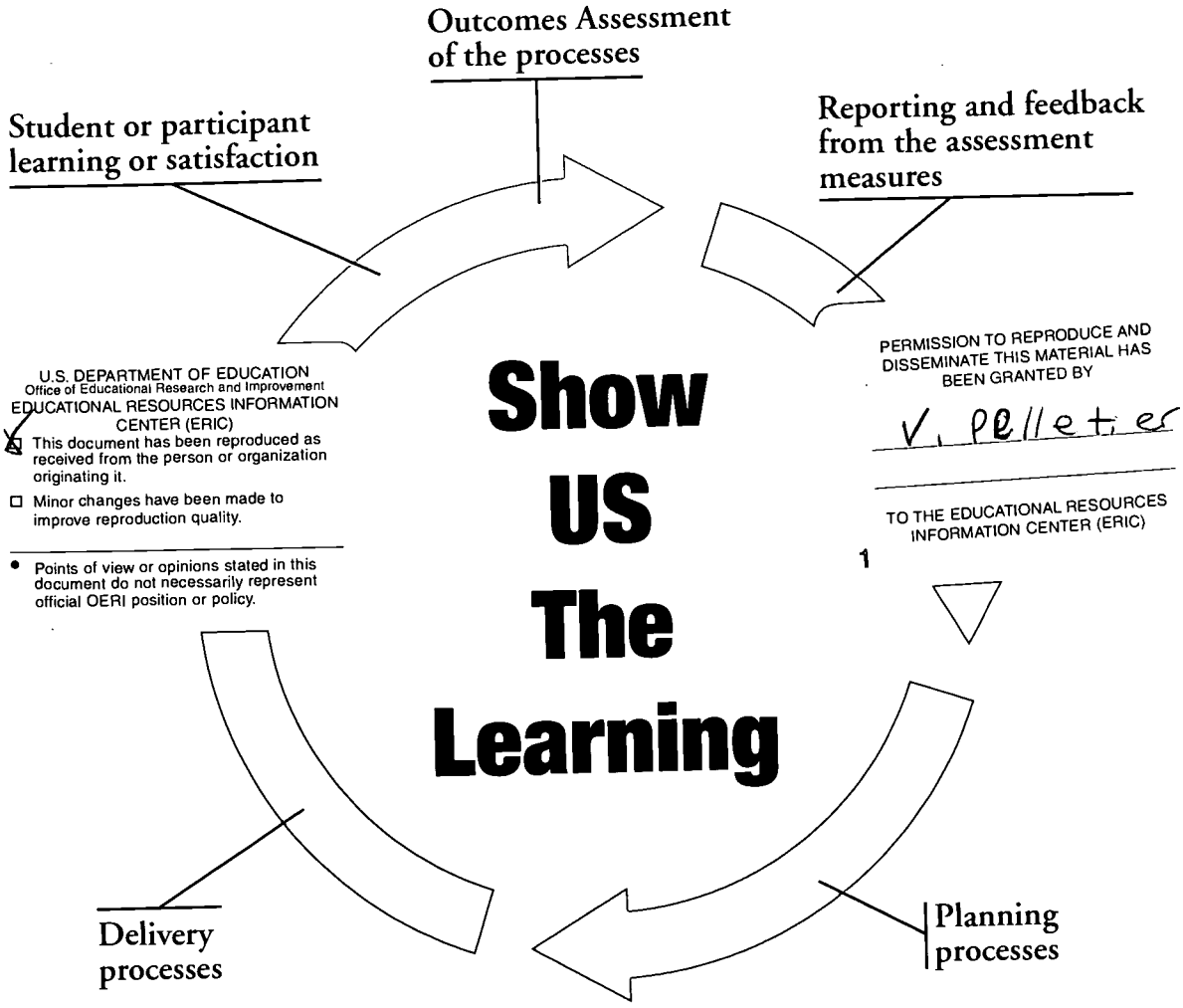

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Assessment

An Institution-Wide Process to Improve and Support Student Learning

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ERIC

College of DuPage

Developed by members of
The Student Outcomes Assessment Committee
at College of DuPage
425 22nd Street
Glen Ellyn, IL
April 2000
Supported by
Educational Planning Council

Assessment

An Institution-Wide Process to Improve and Support Student Learning

What is assessment? 2
How does assessment fit into classroom instruction? 4
How does assessment fit into discipline and program curriculums? 7
Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Planning: Flow Chart 10-11
How does assessment fit into college-wide learning outcomes? 13
College-wide assessment of general education skills 15
How does assessment fit into the institutional planning activities? 16
What are the characteristics and standards used to develop assessment tools? 17
What are the responsibilities of the Student Outcomes Assessment Committee? 17
What are the responsibilities of full-time faculty members toward assessment? 18
What are the responsibilities of part-time faculty members toward assessment? 18
What are the responsibilities of administrators toward assessment? 19
What are the resources and tools available at College of DuPage? 19
Glossary of assessment concepts as applied at College of DuPage 20

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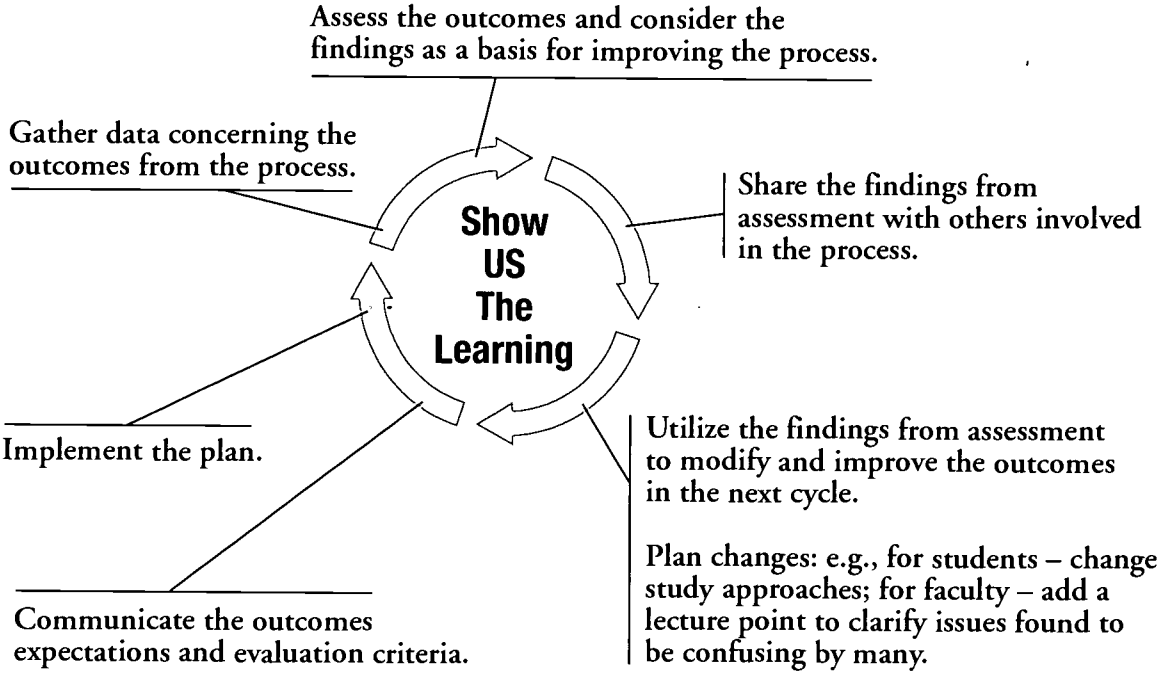


What is assessment?

> Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high 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. Assessment helps us create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education.[1]

Thus, assessment is not a single cycle of actions but an **ongoing process**, which ideally permeates the institution from classroom to meeting room. The assessment process involves **both** gathering information and using that information as feedback to modify and improve student outcomes.

Assessment is a repeating cycle of basic actions.

1. The organizers plan and define the outcomes or expectations and make them public.
   - Organizers include faculty members in a classroom, faculty and administrators in programs, and the college community at an institutional level.
   - Organizers make this communication explicit, and the outcomes attainable and challenging. Thus, organizers clarify their own expectations and share these outcome goals and standards with participants.

[1] *AAHE Bulletin*, November 1995.

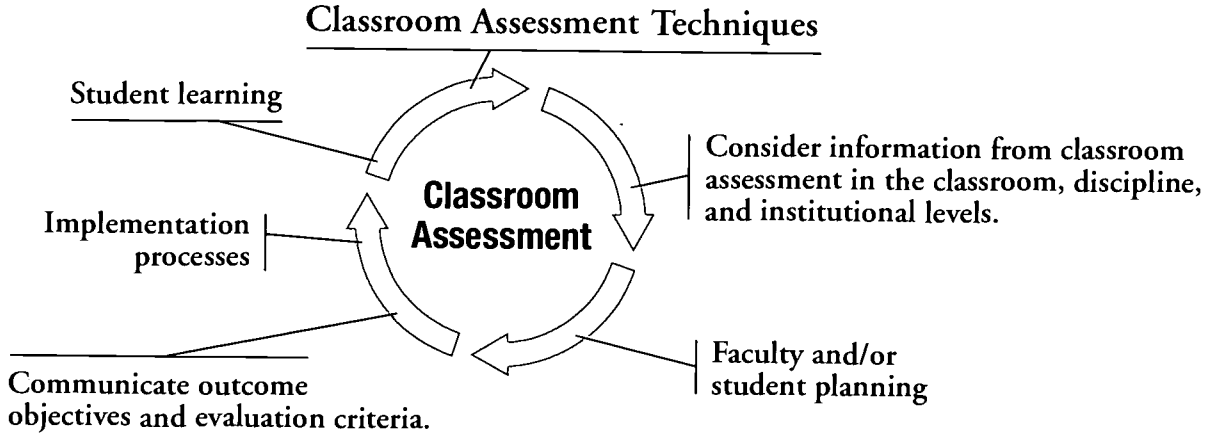
- Organizers communicate these expectations to those participants involved in accomplishing the tasks. In the classroom this means making expectations clear and focused to students. At the institutional level this means making expectations clear and focused to the college community.

2. The organizers carry out the action, implement the plan, or conduct the activity.
3. The organizers gather data that measures the participants' accomplishment of the outcomes and expectations. Responsibility for successfully accomplishing the expected outcomes involves actions by all parties involved in the activity. Thus, both faculty and students are responsible for learning in a classroom; the Board, administration and faculty are responsible for institutional outcomes.
4. The organizers share the observations with those involved in the process and those who can influence future outcomes (students, other faculty, educational planners, funding and other resource providers, etc.). A significant part of assessment is providing ongoing feedback to both the organizer of an activity and participants in that activity.
5. The organizers assess the success of the action in attaining the expected outcomes and identify any relevant concerns.
6. The organizers strategize a response or design modifications to the process to improve outcomes in the next cycle. These modifications may involve both the organizer (faculty) and the participant (student).
7. The organizers implement those strategies either when beginning a new cycle, continuing the current cycle, or both. (Assessment isn't limited to end of term; rather it is a continuing cycle using multiple approaches at multiple levels of the organization.)
8. The organizers repeat the gathering of data, focusing on changes in outcomes based on the new strategy and repeat the analysis for continued improvement in outcomes.

The word assessment can be interpreted in different ways. In this document, "assessment" refers only to outcomes assessment focused on the learning processes. This type of "assessment" is not for the purpose of evaluating an individual student or a faculty member's performance. **Feedback developed through outcomes assessment should not be included in evaluation procedures.** Thus, outcomes assessment should not be used to refer to faculty evaluation. It should be noted, however, that conducting outcomes assessment is a responsibility of each faculty member.

Another definition of "assessment" relates to grading and evaluating student performance. It is possible for a student-grading instrument (say a test) to be used first as a basis for assigning a performance grade to a student, and then in a combined analysis of test results aggregated among all students to be used as an outcomes assessment tool for an instructional unit. In this example, then, a test functions both as a grading instrument, and as an outcomes assessment tool. But these two processes should be conducted in separate steps.

Outcomes assessment processes and cycles occur throughout the institution from classrooms to college-wide strategic planning. The next few pages examine specifics of some of those processes at College of DuPage.



How does assessment fit into classroom instruction?

In a learning activity, planning and design come together with students' actions. It is the nexus of the learning process. Learning activities occur in the classroom and outside the classroom, when students

- study a textbook or other source of information
- experience a lab activity or field experience
- work through a distributed learning assignment
- or whenever students respond to a directed activity or assignment.

All of these learning activities can become a focus for "classroom assessment."

In the classroom, a faculty member may use classroom-assessment-techniques [CATs] to gather feedback about a single lecture/discussion, to examine students' grasp of key concepts and issues in the discipline, or to solicit students' self-reflective assessments of their progress in a particular unit of study. Feedback from classroom assessment can impact learning in two important ways. First, when the results of a CAT are shared with students, that feedback can assist them in knowing what they've learned, what they need to learn next, and under which conditions they learn most successfully. Second, the results of a CAT can help the instructor target the upcoming instruction, building on what students know and filling in gaps in knowledge that keep students from progressing.

CATs are brief and readily adaptable to a variety of learning environments. They can become a regular activity for opening or closing class sessions, and they can be conducted over the Internet or in the field. The focus of CATs is the immediate learning situation.

- What do students already know?
- What are students confused about?
- What do they want to know as a result of what they have just learned?
- How have students modified their actions to improve their success?

In each learning activity the process of assessment can support faculty efforts that lead to student success through a variety of tools. Some common CATs include:

- **One-minute understanding checks** allow faculty a quick means of identifying both skills and concepts that need further practice or clarification and those that students have begun to master.
  1. The Minute Paper: Ask students to spend one minute at the end of class summarizing a key concept covered that day.
  2. The Muddiest Point: Ask students to describe the one concept covered in class that day that they are still unclear or uncertain about.
  3. Three Questions: Ask students to list one new thing they learned that day, one thing they are still uncertain about, and one question they'd like answered.

- **Prior Knowledge Inventory:** Before introducing a new concept, students spend a minute or two describing their prior knowledge and experience. What do they already know about how to organize an essay, construct an argument, or conduct research?

- **Post-Instruction Inventory:** Once a new concept has been introduced and thoroughly practiced, ask students to describe how their perceptions and practices have changed. What new things have they discovered, for instance, about how to approach organization, argument or research?

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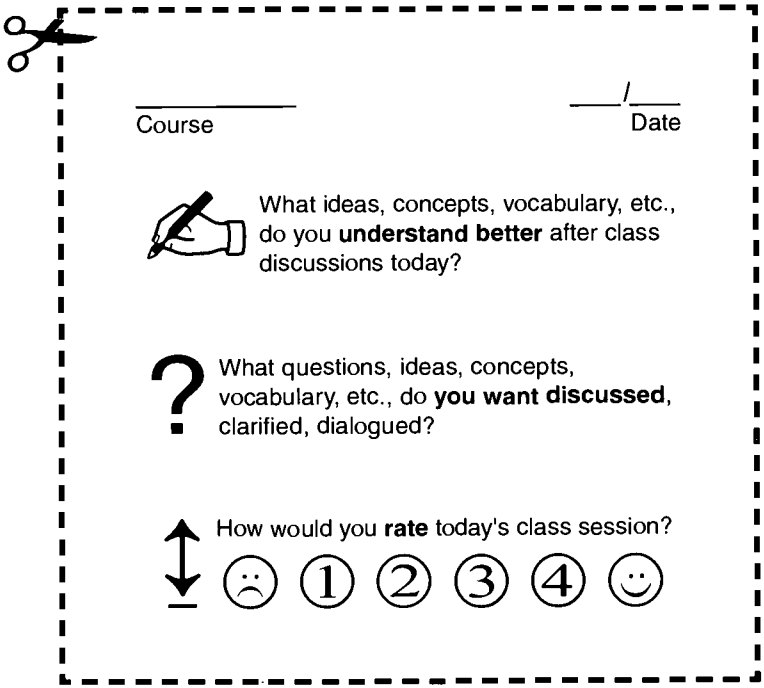


- **Written rubrics:** Rubrics clearly and explicitly outline both the goals of a given learning activity and the criteria by which it will be evaluated. Rubrics ensure a clear understanding of what is expected and allow faculty to provide more focused and efficient feedback on class assignments.

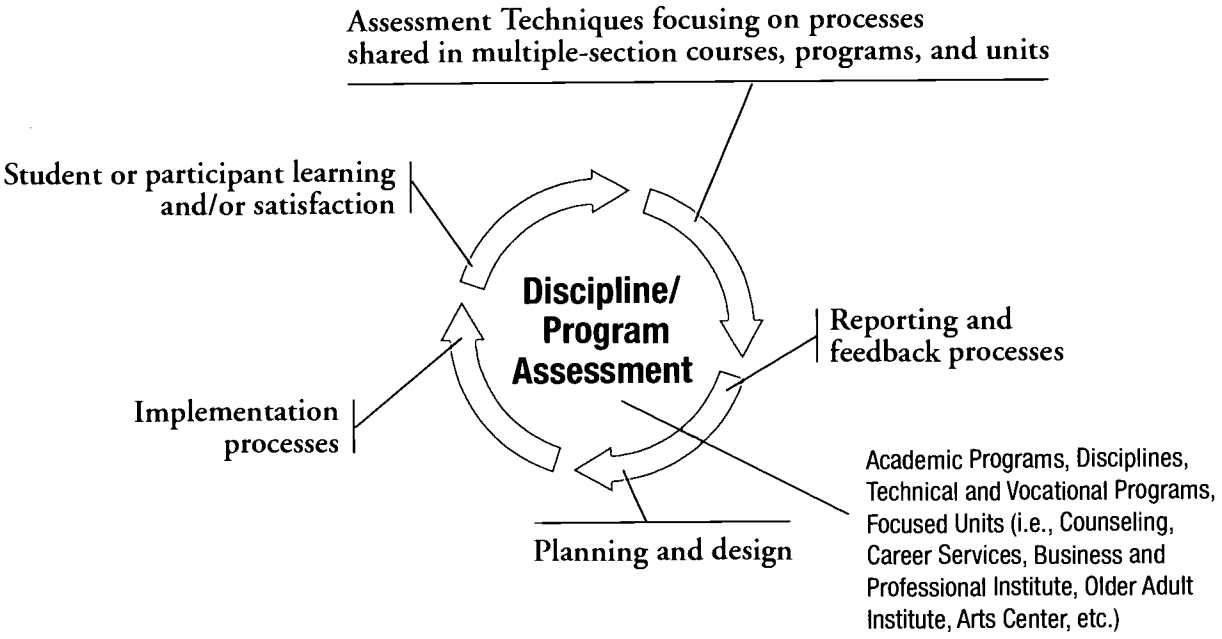
- **Pre-Post-test performance inventories.** Before turning test scores back to students, students respond to the following question:
  1. My predicted percent of accuracy on the test is ____.
  Then after receiving their score, students respond to the following questions:
  2. My actual percent of accuracy was ____.
  3. Assuming I learned something during this unit, I would credit myself for the following reasons:
  4. Assuming I learned something during this unit, I would credit the instructor for the following reasons:
  5. Assuming I failed to learn something during this unit, I would blame myself for the following reasons: [2]
  6. Assuming I failed to learn something during this unit, I would blame the instructor for the following reasons: [2]
  Then answers are transcribed into a feedback sheet that is distributed and briefly discussed in the next class meeting.

- **Study Habits/Skills Inventory:** Have students answered several key questions about how they prepared an assignment or studied for an exam? How soon before the due date did they begin? How much time did they spend overall? In retrospect, do they think they spent too much or too little time? How would they approach the assignment next time? What are their strongest and weakest study skills? How can you help them study more effectively?

- **Self-Assessment:** Ask students to write a brief self-assessment paragraph to accompany an essay or assignment you collect. What would they identify as the strengths and weaknesses of their work? Are there any sections they'd like you to pay particular attention to as you evaluate? Which prior problems have they overcome or are they still struggling with? Self-assessments can cover more than one assignment, too, and may prove particularly valuable when assigned to accompany conference and workshop sessions or portfolio reviews.

A great source for assessment tools is Angelo and Cross' book *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. Copies of this book are available in the Teaching and Learning Center.

[2] Some faculty may find "blame" too negative and might prefer "... I could make the following changes to improve learning," although this also changes the focus of the attribution. Most authors recommend others to take their CATs and edit them according to individual ideas. We list this CAT as several C.O.D. faculty have used it, feel free to edit.



How does assessment fit into discipline and program curriculums?

Widening the scope of assessment to include multiple-section, discipline, and program assessment involves extensive collaboration. At this level, assessment brings together faculty and/or administrators to examine outcomes from multiple, coordinated activities. For example, several faculty may examine the patterns of outcomes from multiple sections of the same course, or several courses in a discipline, or a program. This broader scope of assessment requires coordination, cooperation, and participation among faculty.

For example, if the faculty in a subject area decide to examine some aspect of a specific course or sequence of courses, they would design an assessment instrument to be used in all sections of that course. Then after collecting their data, the faculty would meet to examine the findings, judge satisfaction with the results of the feedback, and design or plan a change, if needed.

Examples of discipline and multi-course assessments include the following:

- A course-exit exam in which items are analyzed to identify areas of instruction requiring strengthening.
- A sampling of student work accumulated into a portfolio that is analyzed to identify growth in a course or across a sequence of courses. Discipline or course portfolios can be examined by one or more outside examiners.
- A standardized examination from an outside source.

Although the examples focus on disciplines and programs, these same processes are conducted throughout the college. The focus of such assessment may remain similar for several cycles, or it may change as the areas of interest or concern change.

What is critical is that

- those involved in delivering the learning activities, courses, and programs coordinate and cooperate in setting the focus and criteria of the assessment, which may evolve as feedback collected and analyzed over time.
- those involved in delivering the learning activities receive and examine the feedback from outcomes assessment.
- those involved in delivering the learning activities decide what change, if any, to make in both their course outline and in their individual classrooms.

Assessment at these levels is critical to maintaining and improving quality curriculum and services.

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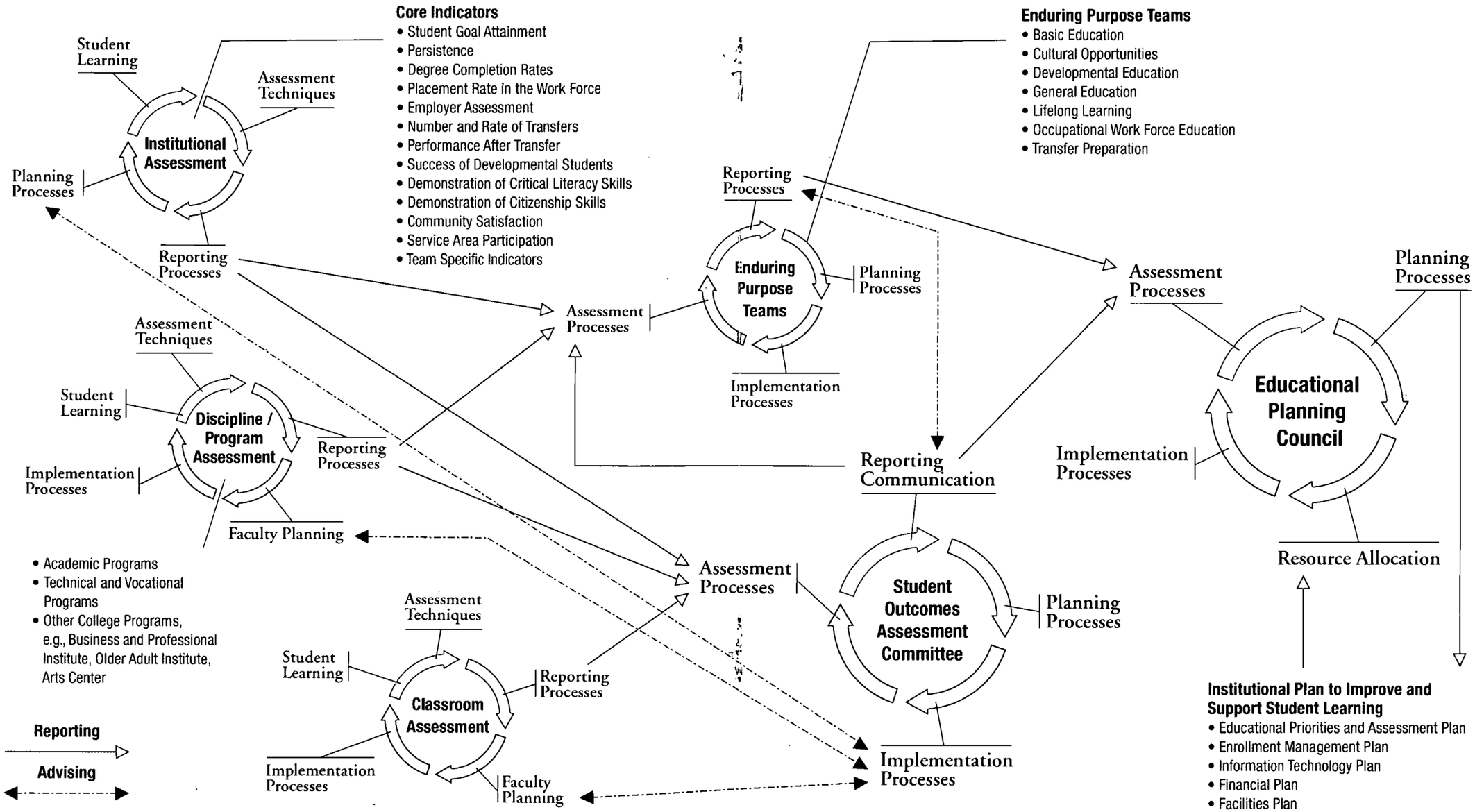
Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Planning: Flow Chart



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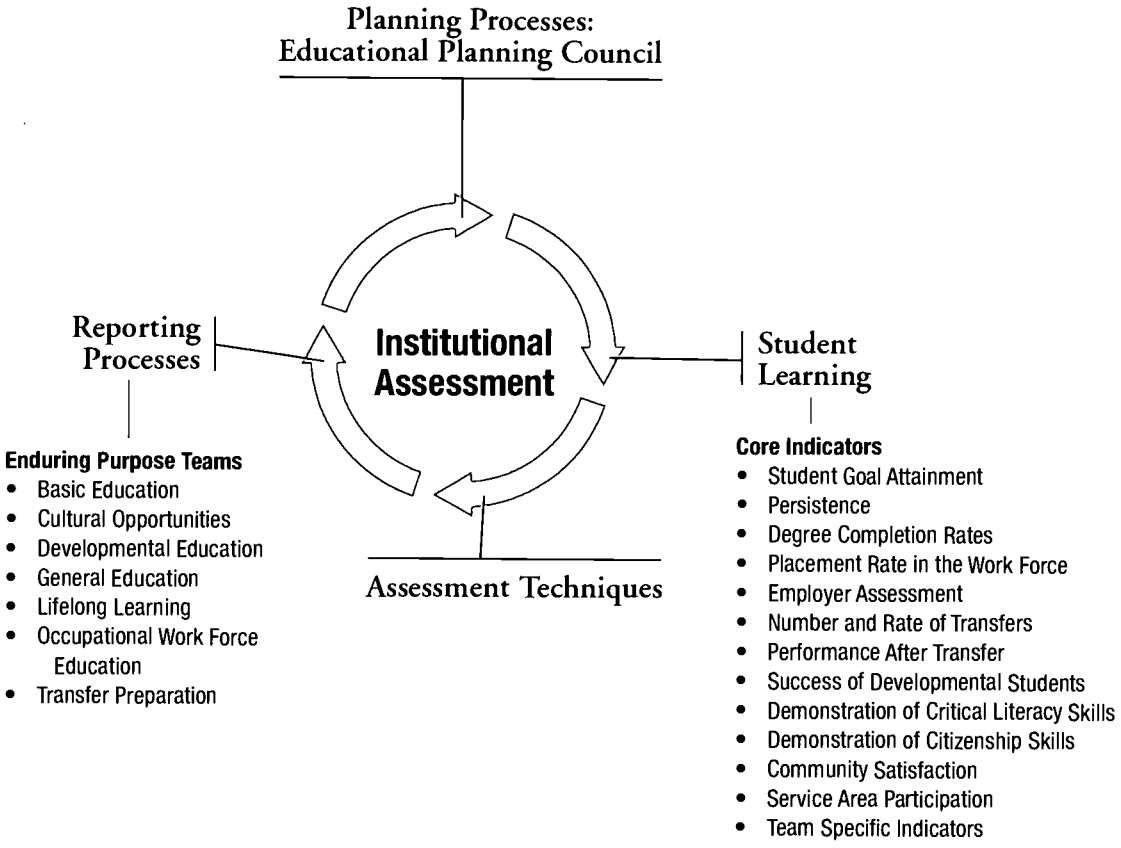


How does assessment fit into college-wide learning outcomes?

Continuing to widen the scope of assessment leads to the processes that involve multiple units, disciplines, and programs at the college. Many of these institution-wide processes are expressed in the college's mission. These include cultural opportunities, general education, career education, basic and developmental education, transfer preparation, and development of civic and ecological responsibility.

Coordination and review of indicators of institutional assessment are the domain of seven Enduring Purpose Teams (EPT):

- Basic Education
- Cultural Opportunities
- Developmental Education
- General Education
- Lifelong Learning
- Occupational Work Force Education
- Transfer Preparation

Each team is composed of faculty, administrators and staff. These teams are provided support from administrative offices, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, and the Student Outcomes Assessment committee.

Each of the EPTs draws together indicators of success and challenges related to its assigned enduring purpose. These indicators include the following thirteen core indicators:

- Student Goal Attainment
- Persistence
- Degree Completion Rates
- Placement Rate in the Work Force
- Employer Assessment
- Number and Rate of Transfers
- Performance After Transfer
- Success of Developmental Students
- Demonstration of Critical Literacy Skills
- Demonstration of Citizenship Skills
- Community Satisfaction
- Service Area Participation
- Team Specific Indicators

In addition to the core indicators, the EPTs can draw on other empirical information, including the frequently exercised option of gathering their own data, results from college-wide assessment projects such as the General Education Skills assessment using ACT-CAAP, or requesting support from the Office of Research and Planning.

Quality assessment requires multiple measures developed from a variety of perspectives and definitions.

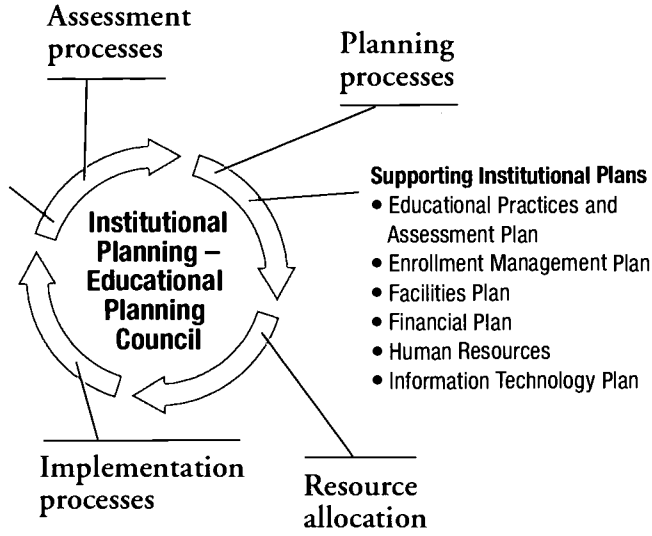
- In the case of transfer or career development, feedback from participants provides one measure, as does feedback from employers or upper-division colleges that receive our graduates.
- Career programs may participate in assessment by their professional associations or by trade groups and employers.
- The State of Illinois Board of Higher Education as well as many colleges and universities provide reports on the success of students transferring from College of DuPage.

College-wide assessment of general education skills

In addition to core indicators, some college-wide assessment needs may be identified and coordinated by specific offices and/or members of faculty, administration and staff. For example, general education skills in reading, writing, critical thinking, science reasoning, and mathematics of C.O.D. students are compared with nationally-normed performances utilizing a nationally recognized test. At the present time we are using the ACT-Collegiate Assessment of Academic Performance [CAAP]. The Student Outcomes Assessment committee coordinates this assessment process. The results of this specific assessment are combined with other indicators by both faculty and the General Education Enduring Purpose Team members for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of our combined efforts at developing students' general education skills.

In order to complete this college-wide assessment, a sampling of students is taken in the fall and spring quarters through a stratified sampling of sections of courses. This requires both student and faculty cooperation. In any one round of testing only a small percent of sections are selected. The selections of sections are rotated among all courses, programs and divisions. While there may be a slight inconvenience and imposition on a small percent of students, the validity of the assessment process depends on testing as many of the randomly selected course-sections and students as possible.

What is critical is that faculty and students support these assessment activities as a way to gather information, which is critical to monitoring and improving students' skills in general education outcomes.



How does assessment fit into the institutional planning activities?

Assessment processes are at the core of the institutional planning activities. Feedback collected through outcomes assessment processes provides empirical support for the decisions made in planning activities. Planning guides resources allocation, and the allocation of resources supports the delivery of the college's services.

At the institutional level, feedback generated at the individual, discipline, program and service levels is analyzed, synthesized and focused on the core indicators.

The challenges and opportunities that face the college in fulfilling its mission are considered in the Educational Planning Council, which includes representatives from administration, faculty and staff. In a process of strategic planning, the council prioritizes and coordinates input resulting in a set of educational priorities. These educational priorities then drive the Institutional Plan to Improve and Support Student Learning. This institutional plan is composed of six college-wide Supporting Institutional Plans (SIPs):

- Educational Priorities and Assessment Plan (formerly the Education Plan)
- Enrollment Management Plan
- Facilities Plan
- Financial Plan
- Human Resources Plan
- Information Technology Plan

The Educational Planning Council and administration construct budget allocations and recommendations utilizing these SIPs, along with prioritized input from various college constituencies. These recommendations are then reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees.

What are the characteristics and standards used to develop assessment tools?

Guidelines for the development of high quality outcomes assessment focus on utilizing processes that reflect several sets of standards.

- Assessments should focus on documenting **effective changes** as the result of activities. Reliable documentation of change requires benchmarking a beginning performance level as well as an improved current level of performance.
- Assessment should make use of **multiple measures of outcomes** to assure reliability and validity. The purpose of outcomes assessment is to find patterns of evidence in which different measures reinforce the validity of a conclusion or judgment.
- Student outcomes assessment should address outcomes at all levels of the learning process.
  - Cognitive
  - Behavioral
  - Affective
- At the institutional level, the focus of outcomes assessment is broadened to
  - program effectiveness
  - students' reports and evaluations
  - management and administrative effectiveness
- Assessments should focus on finding authentic, performance-based measures of the objectives, avoiding indirect indicators where possible.

What are the responsibilities of the Student Outcomes Assessment committee?

The Student Outcomes Assessment committee (SOA) members are drawn from faculty, administration and staff. The SOA's structure and responsibilities are outlined in the original assessment plan approved by North Central (1995); SOA fulfills a coordinating and advising role for outcomes assessment throughout the college. Two functions characterize SOA efforts.

1. SOA supports communication and coordination of assessment efforts and the flow of information about assessment findings.
2. SOA provides expertise in designing assessment activities; in advising faculty, disciplines, and programs; and in coordinating the general education testing project.

To accomplish these functions

1. SOA is represented on the Educational Planning Council.
2. SOA maintains close connections with each of the Enduring Purpose Teams (EPT).
3. SOA provides substantial support and information for development of the Educational Priorities and Assessment Plan.
4. SOA provides faculty, committees and EPTs with resources for designing, applying and analyzing the results of assessment techniques.
5. SOA collects, records and publishes information concerning classroom, discipline and institutional findings.

6. SOA facilitates the flow of information to faculty and among college units.
7. SOA provides faculty oversight of institutional assessment projects that are not division or unit specific.

What are the responsibilities of full-time faculty members toward assessment?

Since the purpose of assessment is understanding and improving the educational outcomes of our efforts, it is in the interest of faculty to assure quality instruction through professional development and responsible outcomes assessment of their actions. Outcomes assessment is first and foremost a faculty responsibility. In support of these ideals, faculty are to be active in assessment through the following activities:

1. Conduct classroom assessments in order to focus student learning and implement instructional strategies supportive of improving student learning outcomes.
2. Report utilization of classroom assessment in order to share ideas and strategies with colleagues and support institutional documentation and accreditation efforts.
3. Participate in planning and conducting discipline and/or program assessment and then work with colleagues to improve discipline and program outcomes.
4. Cooperate with college-wide assessment efforts through active support of general education (e.g., ACT-CAAP), transfer, work force development and other college-wide assessments.
5. Support through actions the assessment activities of Enduring Purpose Teams and respond to challenges as identified by those efforts.

What are the responsibilities of part-time faculty members toward assessment?

Since part-time faculty share professional commitments with full-time faculty, many of the assessment activities are similar. However, in recognition of their limited availability, part-time faculty are not expected to be as active in planning and implementing assessment activities at discipline, program and institutional levels. In support of these ideals, part-time faculty are to be active in assessment through the following activities:

1. Conduct classroom assessments in order to focus student learning and implement instructional strategies supportive of improving student learning outcomes.
2. Report utilization of classroom assessment in order to share ideas and strategies with colleagues and support institutional documentation and accreditation efforts.
3. Participate in conducting discipline and/or program assessment and then cooperate with colleagues to improve discipline and program outcomes.
4. Cooperate with college-wide assessment efforts through active support of general education (e.g., ACT-CAAP), transfer, work force development and other college-wide assessments.
5. Respond to challenges as identified by assessment activities of Enduring Purpose Teams as appropriate at the classroom level.

What are the responsibilities of administrators toward assessment?

Responsibility for assessment is an institution-wide process that is shared by faculty, administration and staff. While the primary responsibility for classroom and discipline outcomes assessment rests with faculty, administrators' role in management and delivery of resources makes them central to effective responses to challenges identified through assessment activities:

1. Encourage and support outcomes assessment at all levels including faculty and discipline and program planning and development efforts.
2. Facilitate faculty, discipline and program changes as designed by faculty in response to classroom and discipline assessment findings.
3. Encourage cross-division dialogues and activities supporting development of assessment efforts and faculty skills across the curriculum.
4. Amplify and support curriculum changes in classrooms, disciplines or programs where challenges have been identified through institutional assessment activities.

What are the resources and tools available at College of DuPage?

Since assessment is such a wide-ranging process, the resources available at C.O.D. are also varied.

- **For those seeking general information about outcomes assessment:**
  Study materials are available in the Library, in the Teaching and Learning Center or through links on the Outcomes Assessment WWW page at *http://www.cod.edu/outcomes*.

- **For those seeking information about classroom assessment:**
  1. Study materials available in the Library, in the Teaching and Learning Center or through links on the Outcomes Assessment WWW page at *http://www.cod.edu/outcomes.*
  2. Complete workshops in the Teaching and Learning Center (both through attendance and online).
  3. Consult with members of the SOA committee.

- **For those seeking information about institutional assessment:**
  1. Connect to the Outcomes Assessment WWW page at *http://www.cod.edu/outcomes* for reports and information.
  2. Contact a member of the SOA committee.
  3. Contact the chairperson of an EPT focused on an issue you want information about.

- **For those seeking information about the planning process, EPTs, and the EPC:**
  1. Visit the Outcomes Assessment WWW page at *http://www.cod.edu/outcomes* for reports and information.
  2. Contact an experienced faculty member or one's associate dean or dean.
  3. Contact the chairperson of one of the EPTs.

Glossary of assessment concepts as applied at College of DuPage

Assessment: a careful evaluation of patterns in students' learning that is used to plan for future instruction or used to modify instructional processes

Authentic Assessment: applies whenever a form of assessment a.) isn't high stakes or b.) deliberately involves students in the process. For instance, rubric-based assessments are generally most "authentic" when students are not only given the rubric, but also are actively involved in its creation and revision.

Benchmark: a sample of work that illustrates a category or score on a scoring rubric

Classroom Portfolio: a collection of student work at different stages of development during a course or over a series of courses. Classroom portfolios include work from one course or discipline. They draw together samples from a variety of genres within that discipline. Classroom portfolios also generally include examples of self-reflective assessment.

Criteria: the aspects of a performance that should be considered in evaluating that performance

Evaluation or Faculty Evaluation: a process of administrative review and consultation with faculty concerning performance in the faculty role. The feedback and insights developed through outcomes assessment are not an appropriate foundation for faculty evaluation.

Grading: a process of faculty review and evaluation of student learning that is used as a basis for rating performance

Holistic Scoring: a scoring process in which a score is based on an overall impression of a finished product compared to an agreed-upon standard for that task

Open-response Items: items requiring short written answers

Performance-based Assessments: items or tasks that require students to apply knowledge in real world situations

Performance Events: assessment tasks that require students to apply what they have learned

Portfolio: a representative collection of a student's work, including some evidence that the student has evaluated the quality of his or her own work

Prompt: a short statement or question that provides students a purpose for writing, also used in areas other than writing

Rubric: a set of scoring guidelines that can be used to evaluate students' work

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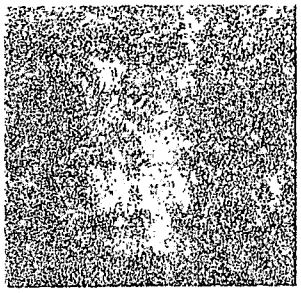

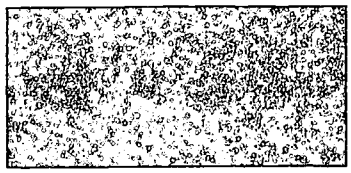

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