

Guidelines for Using Results and Interpretations

Adapted from Source: Peggy Maki book

Uses of Results and Interpretations should:

- indicate how program will use what it has learned about the assessment process or the learning outcome of interest
- provide timetable for implementing changes and then following up to see if the change had the intended effect
- describe why the changes will lead to improvements in student learning or the assessment process
- describe the program's focus for the next assessment cycle

Using Assessment Results and Interpretations

*Adapted from: Ball State University, Assessment Workbook (1999) &
Southeast Missouri State University, Busy Chairperson Guide to Assessment (2001)*

In any given year, it may not be necessary or appropriate to implement a program improvement initiative based on assessment results. Still, the goal of the assessment process is to encourage discussions that make the curriculum and instruction in our programs better. As our assessment processes improve, the contribution of that process to making our programs better should also increase. If program improvements are based on assessment results they should be reported. These reports of efforts to improve programs are telling indicators of a vital, ongoing assessment program. If your assessment program is not giving you useful information for program improvement, then how the assessment process is conducted should be addressed.

A program might take one or more of the following actions based on its assessment results and interpretations for a specific outcome:

1) Improve assessment method used

This conclusion is likely if the method used to assess learning could be conducted more effectively.

2) Further assess the learning outcome with the same question of interest

This conclusion is likely if more information about learning outcome and question of interest is needed before valid interpretations can be made. This might have occurred because not enough evidence was collected or another type of evidence needs to be collected.

3) Further assess the learning outcome with a different question of interest

This conclusion is likely if the question of interest was answered satisfactorily or the question of interest needs to be restated so that other dimensions of the learning outcome can be explored further.

4) Repeat assessment of learning outcome and questions of interest after implementing a program change

This conclusion is likely if the program makes an improvement and then repeats the assessment method to determine if the change led to the intended effect.

5) Identify a new learning outcome and question of interest

This conclusion is likely if question of interest is answered satisfactorily and the program is interested in assessing other learning outcomes.

UNL Outcomes Assessment Guidebook

Component 6: Using Results and Interpretations

An Action Plan

Adapted from: University of Massachusetts-Amherst, OAPA Handbook

Using an action plan can help continue your cycle of assessment by documenting what you have learned from the process and results. A plan like this can also be useful for determining your next or future cycles of assessment plans. Deciding in a concrete ways how you will use what you have learned will help the program document its effectiveness as well as to identify areas of assessment that might be more broadly useful.

Action Item	Action Type	Action to take	Steps to Implement	Timeline for implementing	Intended Effect	Timeline for follow-up
1	___ Improve assessment method ___ Implement program improvement ___ Further assess outcome	Encourage students who have demonstrated prior knowledge	1. From the data, identify content areas or greater knowledge 2. Develop extra credit tasks for students to complete to build on their knowledge 3. Establish a reward system to eliminate sense of extra work as “punitive”			
2						
3						

Primary and Secondary Uses of Assessment Results

*Sources: Ball State Univeristy, Assessment Workbook
William Peirce, Course Assessment Handbook
University of Central Florida, Program Assessment Handbook*

Primary uses:

- **Internal Program Reviews/Curriculum reviews**
Evidence of student learning can be used by programs to encourage discussions of perceived strengths and weaknesses and generate ideas of how to improve the program's effectiveness.
- **Communication with students**
What is learned from the assessment process and results can be shared with students to help them better understand the program's expectations of them and place more ownership for that learning on those students.
- **External Accreditation reports and reviews**
Results can be used to confirm the program helps students attain learning outcomes that are valued and documentation of the assessment process can demonstrate the program is engaged and committed to a process of systematically using evidence of learning to improve its program.
- **Requests to a curriculum committee**
Assessment data may accompany requests to a college curriculum committee for course changes or new courses.

Secondary uses:

- **Recruiting**
Findings about the satisfaction of current majors and clear intentions about what the program will prepare students to know and to do can be used to recruit new students to the department.
- **Alumni newsletter**
- **Career services**
Department alumni surveys can demonstrate to prospective employers why graduates from that department are more skilled, and better qualified than graduates from similar departments at other universities and colleges. This can be done on a departmental level or centrally.
- **Securing grants**
Many grants that involve address innovations in teaching and educational programs now require an assessment of that innovation to determine its effectiveness.

Examples of Program Improvements

So if the assessment process suggests some aspect of student learning might need to be improved what might those improvements be. The following are some examples but not an exhaustive listing of the unlimited possibilities for improving programs.

Using assessment results as evidence, programs might decide to

- Revise the program outcomes to include higher-order thinking and greater intellectual rigor
- Obtain more consistency in the content and skills taught in large multi-section courses
- Improve communication with adjunct faculty about program outcomes and course outcomes
- Address coherence of the curriculum by eliminating redundancies and identify gaps in learning or opportunities to practice that learning
- Provide students multiple and varied ways of learning critical concepts
- Explore active learning strategies and other teaching methods
- Explore other ways of assessing outcomes
- Explore technological enhancements (labs, equipment, CD tutorial, etc.), using the assessment evidence to support a request for increased funding
- Conduct a retreat or workshop for faculty and staff to learn how to integrate experiences that contribute to improved student learning
- Engage students in taking greater ownership for their learning by tracking their own progress towards learning outcomes
- Improve process of advising so focuses on student attainment of learning outcomes
- Develop out of class experiences for students to supplement what is learned in the classroom
- Map out how students will develop across the curriculum the knowledge and skills needed for demonstrating a learning outcome.