

A current trend in higher education is the focus on student learning. Accrediting bodies are no longer satisfied with qualified faculty and good retention rates as indicators of a quality institution; instead, there is an expectation that institutions will clearly articulate program learning outcomes, collect a variety of assessment data, and use the conclusions to implement curricular or pedagogical changes that ultimately lead to improved student learning. For example, the Higher Learning Commission lists “Focus on Student Learning” as their first guiding value and states, “For the purpose of accreditation, the Higher Learning Commission regards the teaching mission of any institution as primary” (Higher Learning Commission, 2015, para. 5). The Commission continues by describing the need for continuous improvement, clear goals, involvement of faculty, and utilization of assessment results. In sum, assessment of student learning is now a significant factor in evaluating the quality of an institution.

Assessing student learning effectively requires a certain infrastructure, including well-written program-level student learning outcomes, a well-designed curriculum map, and a comprehensive assessment plan (Hatfield, 2009). The plan should utilize direct measurements of learning objectives rather than satisfaction surveys or self-assessments of whether learning took place. In addition, the plan should incorporate a variety of formative and summative assessment tools to create a comprehensive view of learning across the student’s experience. The plan should reflect the collaboration of the chair and faculty who agree on the meaning of the outcomes and understand the curriculum map and assessment plan (Allen, 2004).

For this best practice presentation, we will invite Chairs to consider a variety of assessment approaches, to categorize each approach using basic assessment terms, and to identify what the assessment measures. We will also present a basic structure for an assessment plan and suggestions for how to choose assessment strategies. Finally, the Chairs will be encouraged to consider methods for collecting and organizing data, suggestions for training faculty on using assessment tools, and basic guidelines for identifying patterns in data. The presentation will utilize small group activities that Chairs could use in guiding their own faculty (the activities have been successfully used in the past by the presenters for educating chairs and faculty). Following the group activity, we will share the best practices related to creating assessment plans and utilizing the results to improve teaching and learning.

Resources:

Allen, M. J. (2004). *Assessing academic programs in higher education*. San Francisco: Anker.

Hatfield, S. (2009). *Assessing your program-level assessment plan (IDEA Paper 45)*. Retrieved from IDEA website: <http://ideaedu.org/research-and-papers/idea-papers/idea-paper-no-45/>

Higher Learning Commission. (n.d.) The criteria for accreditation: guiding values.
Retrieved from <https://www.ncahlc.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/guiding-values-new-criteria-for-accreditation.html>