

2017

Assessment Glossary

Compiled by Academic Programs
and Services

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The UCM Assessment Glossary is designed to provide a common assessment language for discussion. The glossary provides broad and general descriptions designed to define terms across academic disciplines. It is understandable that a specific discipline (e.g., Psychology, History) may define terms in a different manner.

A

Assessment: Assessment is the ongoing process of:

1. Establishing clear, measureable expected outcomes of student learning outcomes of student learning
2. Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes.
3. Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations.
4. Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning (Suskie, 2004).

Achievement target

An achievement target stipulates the threshold for findings of a measurement qualifying as having met an objective. Separate achievement targets are established for each objective measured by an assessment instrument.

Action plan

The purpose of an action plan for program improvement—not just assessment improvement. Action plans are created to address all objectives that are not met in a given year. If all objectives are met, then at least one action plan to enhance the program is expected.

Aggregated data: Data that have been combined to show averages or other representations of groups of students. Aggregated data should be collected for program-level assessment.

Assessment plan: The document that demonstrates how the program will assess the upcoming year's performance. This document includes: Mission Statement, Goals, Learning outcomes, Curriculum, Criteria, & Methods.

Assessment report: The document that presents data and discusses how assessment results will be used to change curriculum and/or assessment procedure for the coming year. That is, the two key components of this report include the Results and Use of Results.

Authentic assessment: (alternative assessment, performance assessment)

Assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks. Authentic assessments present the student with a full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities.

Alternative Assessment

An assessment that requires students to generate a response to a question rather than choose from a set of responses provided to them. Example of alternative assessment are exhibitions, investigations, demonstrations, written or oral responses, journals, and portfolios.

Achievement Test (Standardized test)

A standardized test is designed to efficiently measure the amount of knowledge and/or skill a person has acquired, usually as a result of classroom instruction. Such testing produces a statistical profile used as a measurement to evaluate student learning in comparison with a standard or norm.

Action Research

School and classroom-based studies initiated and conducted by teachers and other school staff. Action research involves teachers, aides, principals, and other school staff as researchers who systematically reflect on their teaching or other work and collect data that will answer their questions. It offers staff an opportunity to explore issues of interest to them in an effort to improve classroom instruction and educational effectiveness.

Affective

Outcomes of education involving feelings more than understanding; likes, pleasures ideals, and dislikes annoyances, values.

Analytic Scoring

A type of rubric scoring that separates the whole into categories of criteria that are examined one at a time. Student writing, for example, might be scored on the basis of grammar, organization, and clarity of ideas. Useful as a diagnostic tool. An analytic scale is useful when there are several dimensions on which the piece of work will be evaluated.

Aptitude Test

A test intended to measure the test-takers innate ability to learn, given before receiving instruction.

Assessment Task

An illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined instructional aims, allowing students to demonstrate their progress and capabilities.

B

Benchmark

“An actual measurement of group performance against an established standard at defined points along the path toward the standard. Subsequent measurements of group performance use the benchmarks to measure progress toward achievement.”

Benchmarking

Comparing performances of people on the same task; raters use "anchors" to score student work, usually comparing the student performance to the "anchor"; benchmarking is a common practice in the business world. (System for Adult Basic Education Support, 2008)

Best practice

Compares your results against the best of your peers.

Bloom's taxonomy

A classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. Bloom identified six levels (Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create) within the cognitive domain, from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order which is classified as evaluation.

C

Capstone Course

A course which allows the opportunity for students to demonstrate that they have achieved the goals for learning established by their educational institution and major department. The course is designed to assess cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning and to do so in a student-centered and student-directed manner which requires the command, analysis and synthesis of knowledge and skills. The capstone course integrates learning from the courses in the major with the courses from the rest of the academic experience.

Capstone Project

A culminating learning experience which provides an opportunity for the student to integrate and apply competencies acquired through coursework, knowledge, skills and experiential learning and to demonstrate a broad mastery of learning across the curriculum.

Capstone Experience

These holistic activities are designed to assess students' knowledge, acquired skill and problem solving ability using concepts learned as they approach the end of their program. For example, graduating seniors demonstrate comprehensive learning in a senior project or culminating activity that integrates what is learned throughout their program.

Classroom Assessment

An approach designed to help teachers find out what students are learning in the classroom and how well they are learning it.

Classroom Assessment Techniques

A collection of tools faculty can use to get feedback on how well they are achieving their goals. CATs reinforce student learning in three ways: by focusing student attention on the most important elements of the course; by providing additional practice in valuable learning and thinking skills; and by training students to become more self-aware, self-assessing, independent learners.

Closing the Loop = Feedback loop

A process through which assessment data is shared, reflected upon and put into action through a change in any stage of the assessment cycle (e.g., change in outcome, data collection tool, program/service/learning experience, etc.).

Competencies

“Specific ‘skills’ or “behaviors” that a learner can perform or demonstrate. (E.g. graduates must perform at expected level of practitioner.)” Shared power point presentation.

Communication Skills

"To include effective written, oral, and visual communication".

Content standards

Broadly stated expectations of what students should know and be able to do in particular subjects and (grade) levels. Content standards define for teachers, schools, students, and the community not only the expected student skills and knowledge, but what programs should teach.

Course-level assessment

Assessment to determine the extent to which a specific course is achieving its learning goals and outcomes, as well as, assessment to improve teaching of specific courses or segments of courses and compare with program-level assessment.

Criteria

Describes relevant measures that will be used; states precisely what students will be doing; explains the conditions under which students will perform the task; states an acceptable level of aggregate performance.

Criterion-referenced assessment

Compares student performance or score against an established standard (University of South Carolina, n.d).

Curriculum

States where in the curriculum students will be exposed to the necessary materials which will allow them to achieve the learning outcome (e.g. specific courses, co-curricular opportunities).

Curriculum Map

Also known as "course map," "curriculum alignment," or "assessment audit," a curriculum map provides visual representation of how faculty prepare students to meet a program's established student-learning objectives. The process involves identifying where in the curriculum each student-learning outcome is introduced, developed, and mastered.

Culture of Assessment

A set of pervasive actions and behaviors by members of the institutional community that focuses on sharing and using data to inform decisions regarding the improvement of programs, services and student learning (Henning, 2015, p. 11). In this environment, assessment is a valued and expected part of the decision making process.

Culture of Evidence

An environment where assessment results are used to guide policy decisions and is expected and valued.

Cycle (or Assessment cycle)

Maps the assessment process as one that begins with developing goals and continues through using data to inform decisions. (Chistakis, M. & Bureau, D., 2014, p. 40) There are many different assessment cycles. Here is a basic example. Develop goals→Identify outcomes→ Connect with learning opportunities, services or programs→ Gather data→ Review and interpret assessment results→Inform decisions and practices.

D

Descriptor

A set of signs used as a scale against which a performance or product is placed in an evaluation. Descriptors allow assessment to include clear guidelines for what is and is not valued in student work.

Dimension

Aspects or categories in which performance in a domain or subject area will be judged. Separate descriptors or scoring methods may apply to each dimension of the student's performance assessment.

Direct Assessment

Collecting data/evidence on students' actual behaviors or products. Direct data-collection methods provide evidence in the form of student products or performances. Such evidence demonstrates the actual learning that has occurred relating to a specific content or skill.

E

Embedded Assessment - (sometime referred to as Course-based Assessment or Classroom Assessment)

Is a process of gathering data on student learning during the educational experience, designed to help the instructor determine which concepts or skills the students are not learning well, so that steps may be taken to improve the students' learning while the course is still in session. This is an example of formative assessment.

Embedded Exams and Quizzes

Collecting data/evidence on program learning outcomes by extracting a course exam or quiz. Typically, the instructor evaluates the exam/quiz for individual student grading purposes; the program evaluates the exam/quiz for program assessment. Often only a section of the exam or quiz is analyzed and used for program assessment purposes.

Evaluation

A value judgment or a statement about quality.

F

Feedback Loop

Use the results of the assessment to make appropriate modifications to a course, program, service or curriculum.

Formative Assessment

Ongoing assessment that takes place during the learning process. It is intended to improve an individual student's performance, program performance, or overall institutional effectiveness. Formative assessment

is used internally, primarily by those responsible for teaching a course or developing and running a program.

Focus groups

Consists of participants who might contribute useful information related to student learning, either through surveys or interviews. Examples of possible focus groups include: 1) current students; 2) graduating students; 3) alumni; 4) current and perspective employers; 5) supervisors of students in field experiences.

G

Goals

Goal statements are broad, but provide a more detailed discussion of the general aims of the program that support the mission. Goal statements describe intended outcomes for students/graduates of the program in very general terms. The goal statements must list intended outcomes dictated by the mission statement.

Grading

The process of evaluating students, ranking them, and distributing each student's value across a scale. Typically, grading is done at the course level.

H

High Stakes Assessment

Any assessment whose results have important consequences for students, teachers, programs, etc. For example, using results of assessment to determine whether a student should receive certification, graduate, or move on to the next level. Most often the instrument is externally developed, based on set standards, carried out in a secure testing situation, and administered at a single point in time. Examples: exit exams required for graduation, the bar exam, nursing licensure.

Holistic Scoring

Scoring that emphasizes the importance of the whole and the interdependence of parts. Scorers give a single score based on an overall appraisal of a student's entire product or performance. Used in situations where the demonstration of learning is considered to be more than the sum of its parts and so the complete final product or performance is evaluated as a whole.

I

Indicator

A specific description of an outcome in terms of observable and assessable behaviors. It specifies what a person who has the qualities articulated in an outcome knows or can do.

Indirect Assessment

Collecting evidence/data through reported perceptions about student mastery of learning outcomes. Indirect methods reveal characteristics associated with learning, but they only imply that learning has

occurred. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education). Some examples of indirect assessment are surveys, interviews, focus groups.

Inter-rater reliability

When two or more raters observe an individual's behavior, record scores, and then the scores of the raters are compared to determine whether they are in agreement (Creswell, J., 2002). Inter-rater reliability is particularly important in situations where a rubric is being used by multiple people, it's important to test the rubric and train the raters to ensure they are consistently interpreting the rubric.

Institutional Assessment or Institutional Effectiveness

An ongoing systematic process designed by an institution to monitor and improve the quality of the student experience. In this process, departments and programs set goals and gather information that ensures they are meeting stakeholder needs; keeping promises made by the institution's mission and goals; deploying resources effectively, prudently and efficiently; serving the public good and/or demonstrating the quality of their work.

Item Analysis

Analyzing each item on a test to determine the proportions of students selecting each answer. Can be used to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses; may point to problems with the test's validity and to possible bias.

K

Key performance indicator - (also referred to as metric, milestone or target)

Numbers that document how well operational aspects of a program, service or institution are functioning. They often track progress towards larger goals. Common metrics that you find in higher education are: retention rate, graduation rate, enrollment numbers, alumni giving, faculty ratios, etc.

L

Learning outcomes

Statements that identify the knowledge, skills, or attitudes that students will be able to demonstrate, represent, or produce as a result of a given educational experience. There are three levels of learning outcomes: course, program, and institution.

M

Methods = Measures

Describes how and when the outcomes will be assessed, and who will conduct the assessment; describes how assessment data will be disseminated to faculty and staff as appropriate.

Measurement Instrument

The assignment, project or task by which the faculty assesses student learning.

Mission statement

The mission statement is usually a short, one paragraph general explanation of what the program is, and why the program exists. The mission statement should not be a mission discussion; keep it short and very general. Avoid words and phrases generally not used in the English language. At the program level, support from the university administration is gained if the program mission statement supports the college or school mission statement.

N

Nonparticipant observer

A person whose role is clearly defined to project participants and project personnel as an outside observer or onlooker.

Norm

Norms reflect scores on a measure, focusing on the rank ordering of students and not on their performance in relation to set criteria.

Norm Group

A random group of students selected by a test developer to take a test to provide a range of scores and establish the percentiles of performance for use in establishing scoring standards.

Norm-referenced

A norm-referenced test is one designed to highlight achievement differences between and among students to produce a dependable rank order of students across a continuum of achievement from high achievers to low achievers.

Normal Curve Equivalent

A score that ranges from 1-99, often used by testers to manipulate data arithmetically. Used to compare different tests for the same student or group of students and between different students on the same test.

O

Objective

A specific description of an intended outcome.

Observation

The process of direct sensory inspection involving trained observers.

Objective Assessment

A test for which the scoring procedure is completely specified enabling agreement among different scorers. For example, a correct answer test.

On-Demand Assessment

An assessment process that takes place as a scheduled event outside the normal routine. An attempt to summarize what students have learned that is not embedded in classroom activity.

Opportunity to Learn

To expose students to an environment that will enable them to achieve high standards. It is what takes place in the classrooms that enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills that are expected.

Ordered data

Nonnumeric data in ordered categories, for example, students' performance categorized as excellent, good, adequate, and poor.

P

Paradigm

A general conception, model, or "worldview" that may be influential in shaping the development of a discipline or sub discipline, for example, "the classical, positivist social science paradigm in evaluation.

Participants

Those individuals who are directly involved in a project.

Participant observer

An evaluator who participates in the project (as participant or staff) in order to gain a fuller understanding of the setting and issues.

Performance evaluation

A method of assessing what skills students or other project participants have acquired by examining how they accomplish complex tasks or the quality of the products they have created (e.g., poetry, artwork).

Population

All persons in a particular group.

Program-Level Assessment

The assessment of student learning across the learning outcomes identified for a specific program or major.

Program Review

Periodic and comprehensive analyses of the strengths and opportunities for improvement for a specific program or major.

Prompt

Reminder used by interviewers to obtain complete answers.

Purposive sampling

Creating samples by selecting information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the evaluation.

Project

A complex assignment involving more than one type of activity and production. Projects can take a variety of forms, some examples are a mural construction, a shared service project, or other collaborative or individual effort.

Product

The tangible and stable result of a performance or task. An assessment is made of student performance based on evaluation of the product of a demonstration of learning.

Percentile

A ranking scale ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 99 with 50 as the median score. A percentile rank indicates the percentage of a reference or norm group obtaining scores equal to or less than the test-taker's score. A percentile score does not refer to the percentage of questions answered correctly, it indicates the test-taker's standing relative to the norm group standard.

Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment is a test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting.

Performance Criteria

The standards by which student performance is evaluated. Performance criteria help assessors maintain objectivity and provide students with important information about expectations, giving them a target or goal to strive for.

Portfolio

A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selection of its contents, and should include information about the performance criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation. It should include representative work, providing a documentation of the learner's performance and a basis for evaluation of the student's progress. Portfolios may include a variety of demonstrations of learning and have been gathered in the form of a physical collection of materials, videos, CD-ROMs, reflective journals, etc.

Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios may be assessed in a variety of ways. Each piece may be individually scored, or the portfolio might be assessed merely for the presence of required pieces, or a holistic scoring process might be used and an evaluation made on the basis of an overall impression of the student's collected work. It is common that assessors work together to establish consensus of standards or to ensure greater reliability in evaluation of student work. Established criteria are often used by reviewers and students involved in the process of evaluating progress and achievement of objectives.

Primary Trait Method

A type of rubric scoring constructed to assess a specific trait, skill, behavior, or format, or the evaluation of the primary impact of a learning process on a designated audience.

Process

A generalizable method of doing something, generally involving steps or operations that are usually ordered and/or interdependent. Process can be evaluated as part of an assessment, as in the example of evaluating a student's performance during pre-writing exercises leading up to the final production of an essay or paper.

Q

Quartile

The breakdown of an aggregate of percentile rankings into four categories: the 0-25th percentile, 26-50th percentile, etc.

Quintile

The breakdown of an aggregate of percentile rankings into five categories: the 0-20th percentile, 21-40th percentile, etc.

Qualitative evaluation

The approach to evaluation that is primarily descriptive and interpretative.

Quantitative evaluation

The approach to evaluation involving the use of numerical measurement and data analysis based on statistical methods.

R

Rating Scale

A scale based on descriptive words or phrases that indicate performance levels. Qualities of a performance are described (e.g., advanced, intermediate, novice) in order to designate a level of achievement. The scale may be used with rubrics or descriptions of each level of performance.

Reliability

The measure of consistency for an assessment instrument. The instrument should yield similar results over time with similar populations in similar circumstances.

Rubric

Some of the definitions of rubric are contradictory. In general, a rubric is a scoring guide used in subjective assessments. A rubric implies that a rule defining the criteria of an assessment system is followed in evaluation. A rubric can be an explicit description of performance characteristics corresponding to a point on a rating scale. A scoring rubric makes explicit expected qualities of performance on a rating scale or the definition of a single scoring point on a scale.

Random sampling

Drawing a number of items of any sort from a larger group or population so that every individual item has a specified probability of being chosen.

Recommendations

Suggestions for specific actions derived from evidence-based conclusions.

Rationale

Written statements providing the reasons for steps taken and choices made.

Raw Score

The number of items that are answered correctly out of the total possible.

S

Sample

A part of a population.

Scale

A classification tool or counting system designed to indicate and measure the degree to which an event or behavior has occurred.

Scale Scores

Scores based on a scale ranging from 001 to 999. Scale scores are useful in comparing performance in one subject area across classes, schools, districts, and other large populations, especially in monitoring change over time.

Score

A rating of performance based on a scale or classification.

Scoring Criteria

Rules for assigning a score or the dimensions of proficiency in performance used to describe a student's response to a task. May include rating scales, checklists, answer keys, and other scoring tools.

Scoring

A package of guidelines intended for people scoring performance assessments. May include instructions for raters, notes on training raters, rating scales, samples of student work exemplifying various levels of performance.

Secondary data analysis

A reanalysis of data using the same or other appropriate procedures to verify the accuracy of the results of the initial analysis or for answering different questions.

Self-administered instrument

A questionnaire or report completed by a study participant without the assistance of an interviewer.

Stakeholder

One who has credibility, power, or other capital invested in a project and thus can be held to be to some degree at risk with it.

Standardized tests

Tests that have standardized instructions for administration, use, scoring, and interpretation with standard printed forms and content. They are usually norm-referenced tests but can also be criterion referenced.

Strategy

A systematic plan of action to reach predefined goals.

Structured interview

An interview in which the interviewer asks questions from a detailed guide that contains the questions to be asked and the specific areas for probing.

Student Artifacts

A collection of papers, projects, documents, etc., which represent your knowledge, competency, understanding, and achievement of identified goals and learning incomes.

Student Self Reflection

Student ratings of their knowledge, skills and attitudes. This can provide useful indirect evidence of student learning and help students develop metacognitive skills.

Summary

A short restatement of the main points of a report.

Summative evaluation

Evaluation designed to present conclusions about the merit or worth of an intervention and recommendations about whether it should be retained, altered, or eliminated.

T

Task

A goal-directed assessment activity or project, which prescribes that the student use their background knowledge and skill in a somewhat long-term process to solve complex problems or answer a multi-faceted question.

Test Blueprint

A list of learning goals that students are to demonstrate on a test; it is especially important for: 1) focusing on learning goals which instructors think are most important; 2) gives appropriate emphasis to thinking skills; 3) provides documentation that students have achieved major learning goals.

Transportable

An intervention that can be replicated in a different site.

Triangulation

In an evaluation, an attempt to get corroboration on a phenomenon or measurement by approaching it by several (three or more) independent routes. This effort provides confirmatory measurement.

U

Utility

The extent to which an evaluation produces and disseminates reports that inform relevant audiences and have beneficial impact on their work.

Utilization of (evaluations)

Use and impact are terms used as substitutes for utilization. Sometimes seen as the equivalent of implementation, but this applies only to evaluations that contain recommendations.

V

Validity

The soundness of the inferences made from the results of a data-gathering process.

Verification

Revisiting the data as many times as necessary to cross-check or confirm the conclusions that were drawn.

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.

W

Weighting

A method to combine the results of two or more assessments used in calculating the percent who meet the standard for a learning outcome. If some assessments are deemed more important due to the amount of time for completion or the number of items included in the assessment, etc. the cut-scores on those assessments may be given greater consideration or weight in determining the overall performance level.

Sources consulted

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