

Common Language for Assessment

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CUPR has developed this document to articulate a shared conceptual understanding and common language for those who desire to work with CUPR. It clarifies terms and definitions used in the Undergraduate Academic Program Review Guidelines and in CUPR's program review activities. We understand that terms such as "assessment" and "outcomes" are defined and used differently by various practitioners and even by various accrediting bodies, and that they may mean different things when applied to entire academic programs than when they are applied to individual courses or class assignments. We do not wish to criticize or discard all those distinctions and subtleties. Rather, we want to clarify concepts and definitions used in CUPR's guidelines and activities and improve communication between CUPR and representatives of NC State's academic programs.

For our purposes, therefore, *assessment* is a form of research that allows for systematic evaluation of the extent to which the program meets its objectives (goals*) and outcomes. At NC State University, especially in the academic arena, it is used to improve programs through proactive, well-informed decision-making.

* goals will hereafter be referred to as objectives

What are the Purposes of Assessment?

- To indicate the extent to which a program achieves its objectives and outcomes so that the program can use the findings to inform
 - program planning,
 - decision-making to improve the program,
 - revisions of program objectives, and
 - resource allocation and budget requests.
- To report program progress and results to audiences such as faculty, deans, the provost, the undergraduate program review committee (CUPR), the Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE), external accrediting bodies, colleagues in other programs and at other institutions, and current and prospective students.

What is the Assessment Cycle?

The assessment cycle is continuous. It should identify/document strengths, weaknesses, needs, improvements and future plans:

- It begins with the identification of program missions, objectives, and outcomes
- It continues with the evaluation of those missions, objectives and outcomes
- Through the reporting of the results of the evaluation, it uses the results for the purposes described above
- Then, it begins again, reexamining mission, objectives, and outcomes, evaluating the outcomes, etc.

What are Objectives?

- They are broad, general statements of [1] what the program wants students to be able to do and to know or [2] what the program will do to ensure what students will be able to do and to know.
- They are evaluated directly or indirectly by measuring specific outcomes related to the objective.
- They are related to the mission and goals of the department and college in which the program resides, and to the mission and goals of the University.

What are Outcomes?

- Outcomes are more detailed and specific statements derived from the objectives. They are used to determine the presence or absence of, amount of, or level of the behavior or knowledge specified by an objective.
- They may be things the program wants students to know (cognitive), ways students think (affective/attitudinal), or things students should be able to do (behavioral, performance, psychomotor).
- Outcomes are observable, measurable results or evidence of the educational experience.
- They are detailed and meaningful enough to guide decisions in program planning and improvement and decisions about pedagogy and practice.

How is Assessment Conducted?

- Participants (assessors) systematically collect and review measures that demonstrate whether or to what extent outcomes have been achieved.
- Measures may be quantitative or qualitative, direct or indirect. They go beyond performance indicators such as graduation rates and may take the form of surveys, assignments or student products from portfolios and capstone courses, interviews, etc.
- It is best if multiple sources of evidence can be used to demonstrate the achievement of outcomes.