

98-06

July 15, 1998

ASSESSMENT POLICY

This policy was recommended by the Academic Senate on May 14, 1998
and approved by the President on June 15, 1998.

1. Introduction

1.1 The broad purposes of assessment are to acquire systematic evidence of our success in fulfilling our mission, especially our desired educational outcomes for students, and to use such evidence to support planning aimed at improving the quality of the University. More specifically the goals of assessment are to:

1.1.1 guide departments, colleges, divisions, and the University as a whole in efforts to strengthen or improve academic programs and support services.

1.1.2 stimulate efforts by departments and colleges to develop collaboratively explicit learning goals for courses, departments and programs and to assess student attainment of those goals.

1.1.3 support effective and efficient campus decision-making.

1.1.4 develop evidence for external constituencies such as the state legislature, the California State University, and the public at large regarding the effectiveness of the University in achieving its mission, strategic goals, and objectives.

1.2 The Assessment Policy for California State University, Long Beach is intended to facilitate assessment throughout the University by establishing basic principles to guide assessment activities.

2. Guiding Principles

2.1 CSULB assessment practices should meet professionally recognized standards of best practice such as the 9 Principles of Best Practice for Assessing Student Learning promulgated by the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum which are incorporated by reference into this policy.

2.2 Assessment practices should be designed to serve the specific needs of this University now and as those needs may change over time.

2.3 Forms of assessment may vary across the University, depending upon the type of assessment which is most appropriate for particular units.

2.4 Priorities for assessment activities should be based upon broad consultation among faculty, staff, and students employing systematic, valid procedures for gathering and integrating information.

2.5 Each campus unit should develop and implement ongoing assessment plans which flow from stated goals for student learning and development and provide useful feedback to the unit for its planning.

2.6 Assessment activities in academic or student development units should provide feedback to students that guide them as they move through their university careers.

2.7 The General Education Program should develop an ongoing assessment plan similar to that of academic units.

2.8 The Program Review process should become the occasion to frame significant assessment questions appropriate to the discipline and department and develop or revise ongoing assessment activities.

2.9 Results of assessment activities are intended for purposes of improvement of programs and shall not be utilized in personnel actions.

EFFECTIVE: Fall 1998

AAHE ASSESSMENT FORUM

9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations—those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way—about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is

not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about. Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation to ourselves, our students, and society is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

Authors: Alexander W. Astin; Trudy W. Banta; K. Patricia Cross; Elaine El-Khawas; Peter T. Ewell; Pat Hutchings; Theodore J. Marchese; Kay M. McClenney; Marcia Mentkowski; Margaret A. Miller; E. Thomas Moran; Barbara D. Wright

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Maintained by: Mary C. Joyce - mjoyce@aahe.org
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