Program Assessment Series, Part 2: Creating an Assessment Cycle

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Goals for this Session

• Outline key steps in developing an assessment plan

• Review the components of an assessment cycle

• Discuss ideas and best practices for developing an assessment cycle as part of your overall assessment plan

• Troubleshoot and answer questions
What is assessment?

• Assessment of student learning outcomes involves gathering useful information on students’ performance and using it to inform curricular and pedagogical revision

• Assessment should be:
  ➢ a collaborative effort
  ➢ led by program faculty
  ➢ implemented by program faculty who review student performance and determine steps to improve the curriculum
Goals of assessment

• Clear identification/description of program characteristics and expectations for student achievement

• Systematic collection of different kinds of (helpful) data to evaluate student progress towards/achievement of those expectations

• Use of analyzed data to inform curricular revision

• Repetition of the cycle to check on results of implementation
Creating a Culture of Assessment at UVM

The goals of the UVM Assessment Initiative are:

• Foster sustainable assessment plans that meet the needs of individual programs

• Provide training and support for “helpful assessment” that contributes to student learning outcomes and program quality, not just “checks the boxes”
By May 2018 we should have:

1) Up-to-date E1B forms from all externally accredited programs

2) Up-to-date E1A forms from all non-externally accredited programs

3) Assessment plan forms outlining cyclical assessment of learning outcomes for ALL non-externally accredited degree programs (graduate and undergraduate).
What is the "Assessment Plan Form"?

The Assessment Plan template is a form with embedded instructions that walks you (the program) through the components of a basic assessment plan, including outlining a cycle of assessment.

The assessment cycle should include some assessment of all of the program’s student learning outcomes over the course of between 3 and 5 years.
Creating an assessment plan
Steps in Program Assessment Planning

1. Develop program-level outcomes with input/drafts by faculty
2. Map curriculum to identify places where students learn, practice and demonstrate their mastery of the outcomes, as well as gaps
3. Gather additional information about student progress within this curriculum through both direct and indirect assessments, e.g.:
   - Surveys of majors and/or alums
   - Faculty summaries of students’ performance on expected skills
   - Rating of samples of student work against a rubric based on an outcome
   - Other indicators (retention of skills from prerequisite courses; identifying predictors of students success, etc.)
4. Use this initial information to develop a plan for assessment of student progress towards/achievement of learning outcomes
5. Progress through the assessment cycle, making sure to regularly review information and “feed it back” into planning and assessment
The importance of a shared vision

• Useful assessment should be a collaborative effort that reflects a departmental SHARED VISION for what students will know and be able to do when they complete your program

• A shared vision:
  • Motivates assessment activities (makes them worthwhile)
  • Helps with prioritizing – what do you want to assess first/most often?
  • Guides how the department uses information from assessment
Recommendations:

• Create time for assessment discussions. Depending on your department, this might involve:
  • Appointing a task force or committee, or tasking an existing committee, OR
  • Setting aside time for a departmental meeting or retreat to discuss assessment OR
  • Setting an assessment agenda and distributing the work across multiple meetings and venues

• Emphasize assessment as part of “curricular hygiene”
  • A healthy program is always engaged in evaluating student progress
  • A healthy program has faculty who negotiate a shared vision of student success within their program and strive to achieve that vision
Few programs start at zero

Even if they do not have clearly stated/updated outcomes, most programs have been gathering and, to some degree, reviewing some data on student success in their program all along:

- Faculty impressions/frustrations
- Student satisfaction/dissatisfaction/pain points
- Grades or other course-level assessments that indicate student skill levels
- Anecdotal evidence about student success after graduation
Where to start? With program outcomes.

• Consider beginning with an alignment exercise
  • Ask: What do we want our graduating students to know and to be able to do based on completing OUR program?
  • Then ask: In general, are our graduates meeting those goals?
  • Then ask: In general, do the courses and other experiences students have in our program help students reach our goals?

• OR consider beginning with a general conversation among faculty teaching senior students: what are their strengths and weaknesses? Overall, are they meeting your outcomes expectations?
Step by step
1. Review Program-level Outcomes

• Although programs may have recently drafted or revised their outcomes, they often need to look at them with fresh eyes in the next step of the assessment process

• Make sure that there are no “loose ends” or outcomes that your program is still grappling with

• Your outcomes should be easily available to students and prospective students on your website, and should be part of their experience in the program
2. Curriculum mapping

A curriculum map or matrix is a tool to link elements of a program (usually required courses and experiences) to learning outcomes.

The goal of curriculum mapping is to identify how graduation-level mastery of the outcomes is scaffolded across the program curriculum, as well as where students’ progress is assessed and feedback given.
Why map a program’s curriculum?

• Create a shared understanding of the program
• Check for “drift” in course goals - the role of courses in the curriculum may have changed over time
• Do a gap analysis to see where overlaps in emphasis, or gaps in coverage, may slow student progress
• Ensure that students are receiving sufficient feedback on key skills and knowledge as they develop the level of mastery expected
• Identify points in the curriculum where existing assessments can provide insights into student progress

TIP: Curriculum Mapping slides and handouts are on the assessment website! This workshop is being offered tomorrow and at the end of this month, or I can cover the material in a meeting with you
3. Gather initial data on student progress

• Use indirect assessments as well as “low-level” direct assessments to get a sense of the “lay of the land”

For example:
• Surveys
• Focus groups
• OIR data/analysis
• Data departments already have on employment/grad school acceptances etc.
• Syllabus audits/reviews
• Review of typical assignments
• “Gut check” faculty short reports and meetings to discuss overall strengths and weaknesses of student work at the end of a semester

TIP: This is a really important step to build confidence and understanding of assessment, as well as establish priorities
4. Use this information to plan assessment components

• Identify “most pressing” needs or clear program priorities

• Gauge which outcomes or sub-outcomes are “low hanging assessment fruit”

• Can multiple outcomes/sub-outcomes be assessed together? Or do single outcomes need to be assessed piece by piece?

TIP: Help program faculty understand the value of the assessments they do/are doing
Where is your program?

Now take a moment to think about where your program is in this process:

1. Program outcomes
2. Map curriculum
3. Gather initial data on student progress
4. Use information to plan assessment components
Step 5: Planning for assessment

Questions to consider:

• How will assessment work be distributed across faculty? Is training needed?

• What is the best way for results of these assessments to be communicated to the department, students, and other interested parties (e.g. alums, other programs, the University)?

• Where will assessment data and records of decision-making processes live?

• How will decisions about next steps be made, and who will be responsible for implementing them?
Components of an assessment cycle
Components of an assessment cycle

• Assessments (direct and indirect)
• Frequency of each assessment
• Processes for regular review and reporting for each assessment activity (can be combined)
  • For example, a department may conduct and review a majors’ survey every year, but do an alumni survey every three years, as well as create a combined report on findings from both with recommendations for action every three years
• Processes for using data from assessments to inform curricular change; each change should be monitored in the next cycle of assessment
Value of both Indirect and Direct Assessments

**Indirect assessments usually:**
- are less resource-intensive
- require less faculty time
- can be conducted on an ongoing basis
- introduce other voices (student voices, alumni voices, employer/supervisor voices) into your assessment process

**Direct assessments of student work:**
- are considered the ‘gold standard’ in assessing student learning
- can provide more accurate and nuanced information about overall strengths and weaknesses of student work
- Involve faculty evaluating students progress towards the goals faculty have identified for the program
Example assessments

**Indirect**

- Survey of majors
- Survey of alums
- Feedback forms for internship supervisors or alumni employers*
- Evidence of program success (job placement; graduate school placements; passing of licensing exams)
- Forums/town halls
- Interactive exercises (e.g. student maps of their own progress through the major)

**Direct**

- Samples of student work are rated against a rubric by faculty
- Faculty review work in a course they teach and summarize strengths and weaknesses of majors at a particular level
- Exam questions are identified and student performance on those questions rated/evaluated against program goals
- Pre-post tests/samples of student work identify whether target aims of a course are being fulfilled.
Selecting assessment methods

“When developing assessment methods, make sure your selections:

• answer questions that are important to you
• are manageable, given available resources (including time and money)
• result in useful feedback that highlights accomplishments and identifies areas requiring attention”

-From “Program-based Review and Assessment” Stassen, et al., pg. 29
Given the resources of your program, which assessment methods from this list would you consider or are you already doing?

**Indirect**

- Survey of majors
- Survey of alums
- Feedback forms for internship supervisors or alumni employers
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Putting it all together
Setting up your assessment cycle

“All at once” – best for programs

• With straightforward goals
• With a large set of required courses
• With the capability to do direct assessment across a range of courses OR
• With capstone experiences in which all outcomes can be assessed

One/two at a time – best for programs

• With complex or wide-ranging outcomes
• With a lot of variation in individual student programs
• Just starting on building “bench strength” in assessment
• Clear priorities on “what needs tackling first”
Creating a cycle of activities

• What indirect assessments can you do?

• What direct assessments can you (reasonably) do?

• For each set of assessments, ask:
  • Who is responsible for creating, conducting, analyzing, reporting and creating recommendations based on these data?
  • What is the frequency
  • How often does the department review results with the aim of using them for a purpose

• Don’t forget to schedule regular points in your cycle where results (including monitoring results of curricular changes) are reviewed holistically and decisions are made/implemented
## Chart (3 year)

Note: A three year chart is included here; 4 and 5 year cycles are also available in the “Forms and Templates” section of the UVM Assessment website.

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Part 2: Where are you now?
Take some time to jot down where you are:

1. Program level outcomes – established? Published?

2. Curriculum mapping – if you have not done a formal process, you may still be able to describe the most likely places for assessment of outcomes to occur, e.g. capstone course; methods course etc.

3. What data do you already have?

4. Can you identify the most pressing issues, or identify outcomes that are most practical to assess as a pair/trio?
Step 1: Outcomes

- Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good. All outcomes can be revised as needed – indeed they should be reviewed regularly to make sure they still accurately reflect your program

- One reason to finalize these goals is so that they are available to faculty and students – rubric elements and outcomes can be incorporated into syllabi and assignments
Step 2: Complete curriculum mapping

• Review your goals

• Review all required courses with the goal of seeing where students develop skills to achieve each of them at the senior “exit” level. Also, where are they assessed on components of these goals?

• If some skills are only developed or scaffolded in elective courses, how can you ensure that those electives all support these skills?

• Is the curriculum well-aligned with your program goals? Are there gaps and/or overlaps in student’s training/experience as they move towards the goals?

• Identify places where you could evaluate student progress towards the goals, particularly at the exit level, or at key developmental points
Step 3a: Organize your Data

• What do you have already?

• How useful is it?

• What else can you gather without a lot of work?
Step 3b: Choose Your Assessment Cycle

Take a moment to look at the assessment plan charts. Begin thinking about how you would distribute assessments across a 3-5 year cycle

• One goal per year

OR

• One type of assessment per year across multiple goals?
Drafting a one-at-time cycle

• Where do you want to start (which goal)?

• Which goal comes next?

• How spread out do you need the assessment cycle to be?
Creating a multi-year cycle...

- Use information from step 2 as well as knowledge of your curriculum to choose outcomes and assessments you expect to do regularly
- Distribute these over a 3-5 year cycle
- Remember that some indirect assessments may be conducted on a separate cycle (e.g. alumni survey every 5 years; major survey every year)
- Build regular meetings/retreats focused on assessment and curricular decision-making into your cycle
Step 4: Creating the plan

Decide what to collect and how to collect, analyze and use it

• What ongoing indirect assessments and collection of student work for direct assessment do you want to do every year?

• Who will process/evaluate the data?

• How will recommendations be decided and changes implemented?

• Who will be responsible for tracking assessment of curricular changes?
Step 5: Long-term planning for assessment

• How will assessment work be distributed?

• What is the best way for results of these assessments to be communicated to the department?

• How will decisions about next steps be made?
Questions?

• Contact me at jadickin@uvm.edu

• Visit the Assessment Website: www.uvm.edu/assessment

• Other workshops in this series include Curriculum Mapping and Direct Assessment Techniques