Program Assessment Series: Creating and Maintaining 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 a assessment cycle
- Launching and maintaining your assessment cycle: staying on plan
- Troubleshoot and answer questions

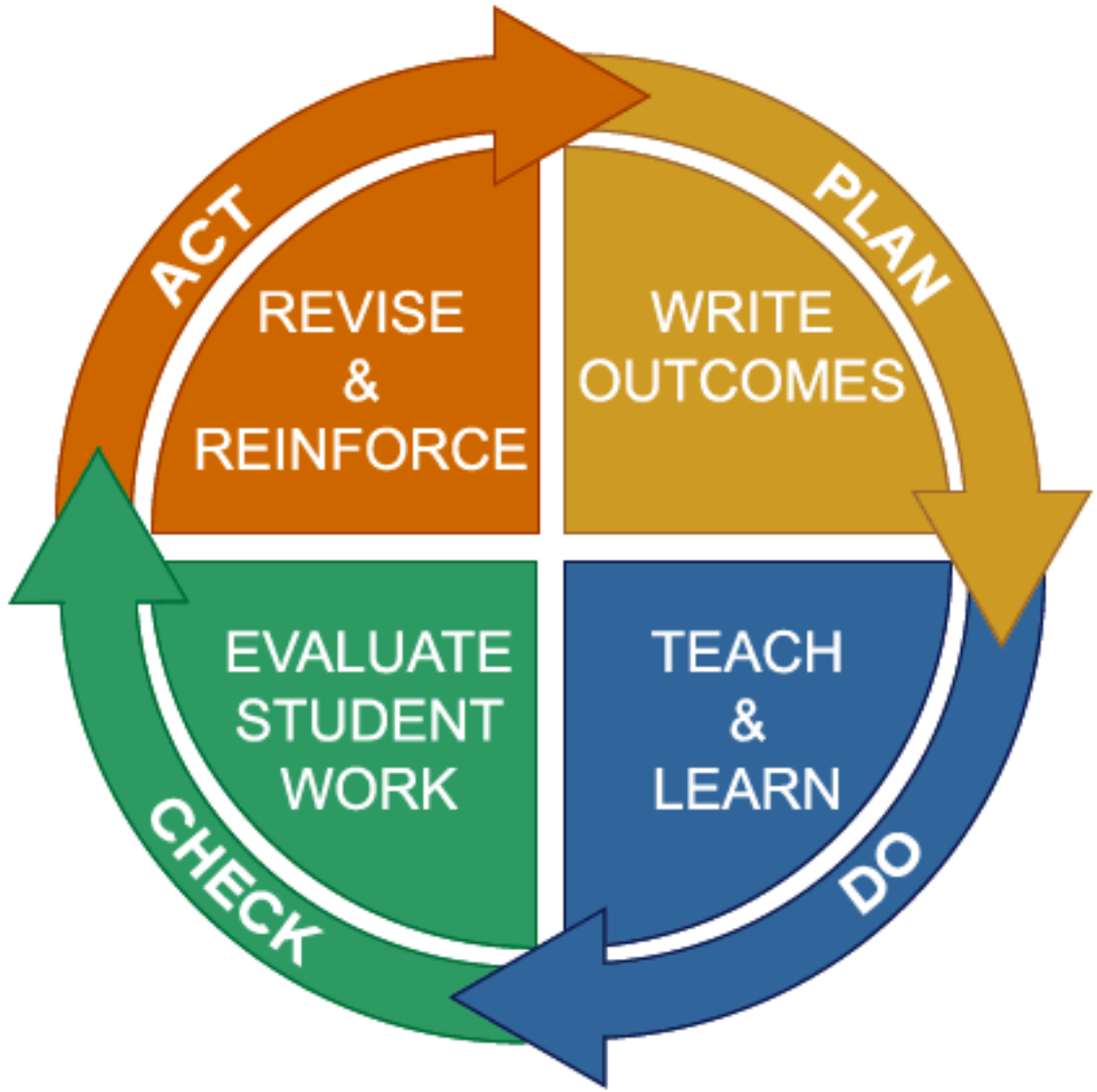
What is assessment?

- 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


ACT
PLAN
DO
CHECK
REVISE & REINFORCE
WRITE OUTCOMES
TEACH & LEARN
EVALUATE STUDENT WORK

Creating a Culture of Assessment at UVM

The goals of the UVM Assessment Initiative are:

- Foster sustainable assessment planning 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”

Our Goal:

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

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

3) ALL non-externally accredited programs follow their assessment plan outlining cyclical assessment of learning outcomes submit brief, annual reports

What is the ”Assessment Plan Form”?

The Assessment Plan form is a template 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.

What goes into the ‘brief annual report’?

- 1-2 page report that is sent to your college/school assessment coordinator
- If you have changed your assessment plan or have an updated E1A form, attach a copy
- The report asks simple questions like the activities outlined on your assessment plan in the previous year, whether you accomplished them, and what your next steps are

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
3. Gather additional information about student progress within this curriculum
4. Use this information to develop a cyclical plan for assessment of student 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
- Information available in Catamount Data

Step by step

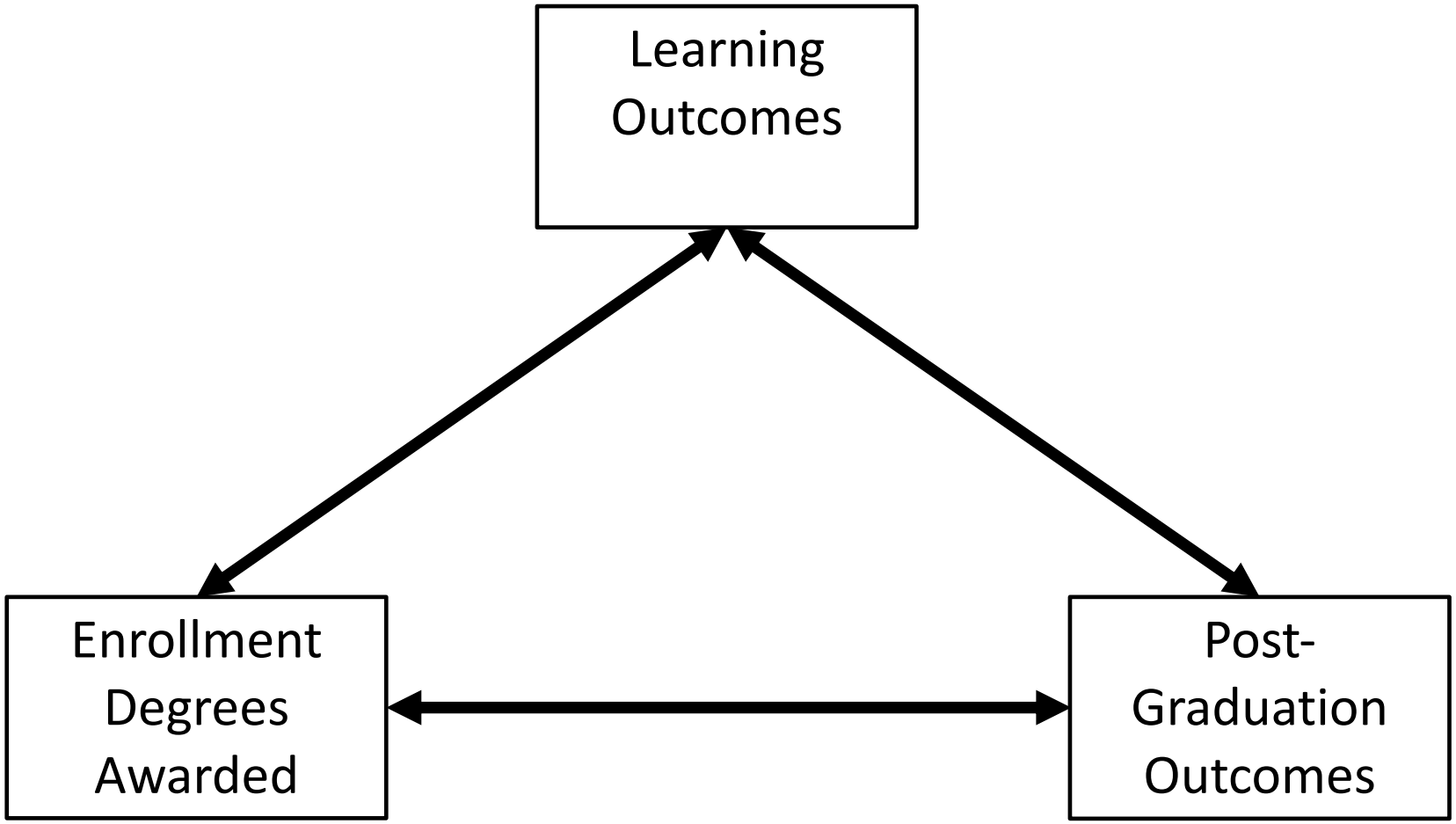
Where to start? With program outcomes.

- Begin 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 them reach these goals?

OR

- Begin with a general conversation among faculty teaching senior students: What are their strengths and weaknesses? Overall, are they meeting your expectations? What are those expectations?

Institutional Research and Student Outcomes



Step 1. Review Program-level Outcomes

- Look at your outcomes with fresh eyes – do they really reflect what you want from your students, and what you can provide?

- Make sure that there are no “loose ends” or outcomes that your program is still grappling with (wording; staffing, curriculum)

- Some version of your outcomes should be easily available to students and prospective students on your website, and should be part of their experience in the program

Step 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

(Curriculum mapping workshop this afternoon at 1:30!)

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 later today, as a custom workshop, or I can cover the material in a meeting with you

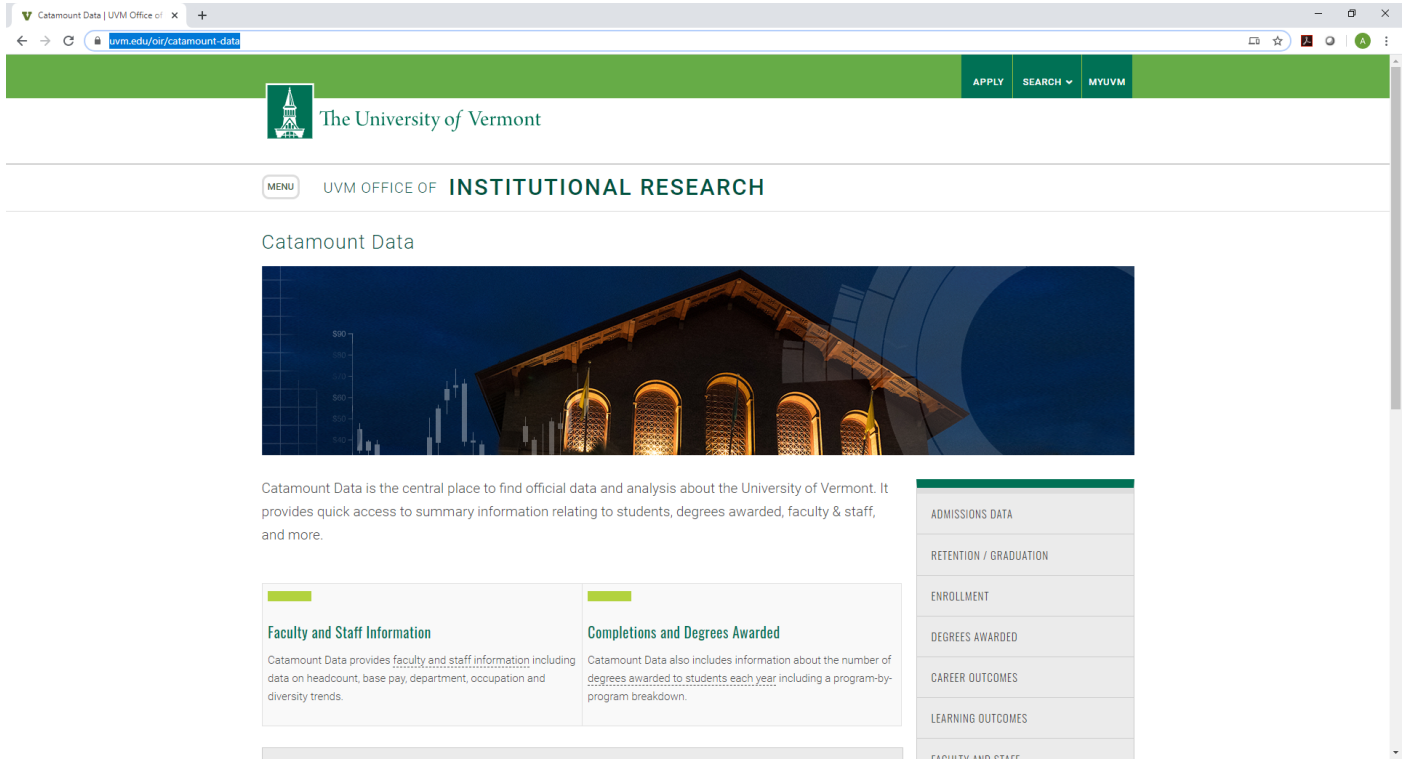
Step 3. Gather initial data on student progress

- Use indirect assessments as well as “low-level” direct assessments to get a sense of the “lay of the land” such as:
  - Surveys of majors
  - Focus groups
  - Syllabus audits/reviews
  - Review of typical assignments
  - “Gut check meetings to discuss overall strengths and weaknesses of student work at the end of a semester
- Use institutional data!
  - Institutional survey data, e.g. NSSE
  - OIR analyses
  - Catamount Data, including employment, and grad school acceptances

TIP: This step builds confidence and understanding of assessment, as well as establishing priorities

Make the most of Catamount Data!

- https://www.uvm.edu/oir/catamount-data



Step 4. Plan assessment components

- Identify “most pressing” needs or clear program priorities
- Gauge which outcomes or sub-outcomes are “low hanging assessment fruit”
- Think about where you can gather data for assessment. Will these “locations” offer insights into more than one outcome?

TIP: Help program faculty understand the value of the assessments they do/are doing, and how they can identify and align assessments more clearly with outcomes

Step 5: Plan for cyclical assessment

- Cyclical assessment can not happen without a plan and structures in place, a person or committee to coordinate activities, and time set aside to discuss results

- Where possible, look to existing decision-making and implementation structures in the program to avoid creating new and cumbersome processes

- Cyclical assessment can not be successful if the effort required is not sustainable

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) available in Catamount Data
- 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
- Evidence of program success (job placement; graduate school placements; passing of licensing exams)
- Forums/town halls
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Putting it all together

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 will be responsible for creating, conducting, analyzing, reporting and creating recommendations based on these data?
  - What will the frequency be?

- Don’t forget to schedule regular points in your cycle where results are reviewed holistically and decisions are made/implemented

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”

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 based on the data you are gathering

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.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2
Assessment Activity					
Assessment Activity					
Assessment Activity					

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?

Some final advice for each step

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, including data on Catamount Data?
- 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?

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
- Check out Catamount Data: https://www.uvm.edu/oir/catamount-data
- Other workshops in this series include Curriculum Mapping and Direct Assessment Techniques