Assessing Student Learning in Student Support Units

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Definition
Assessment of student learning is the systematic gathering of information about student learning and the factors that affect learning, undertaken with the resources, time, and expertise available, for the purpose of improving the learning.

The Three Basic Steps of Assessment
1. Articulate learning goals
   “When students complete this [course, major, gen-ed program] we want them to be able to…."
2. Gather information about how well students are achieving the goals and why
3. Use the information for improvement

The End of Assessment is Action
The purpose of assessment is informed decision-making, including the use of information about student learning.

You Need Process Goals and Learning Goals

Process Goals: Did We Do It?
- How to state the objective: “We will do/provide X”
- Measures answer the question, “Did we do it?”
  - Logs and event records
    - Example: Objective: we will distribute pamphlets on drug/alcohol use to every residence hall
    - Measure: records of how many pamphlets were distributed and where
  - Surveys, focus groups, interviews
    - Example: Did you see pamphlets on drug/alcohol use in your residence hall?

Process objectives always raise the question, “Did the process really help to achieve the client objective?”

Sometimes the distinction between client and process objectives blurs. That’s okay. It’s not the terminology that matters--it’s that you included learning objectives and measured them.
Learning Goals: Did Our Clients Get their Needs Met? Did they Learn?

- How to state the objective: Students (or faculty, staff, alums, etc.) will be able to:
  - Lower level: complete their financial aid forms accurately and on time
  - Higher level: learn habits of accuracy, honesty, and timeliness

- Measures
  - Count the behavior
    - X% of students correctly completed the financial aid form before the deadline.
    - X% of students who used our tutoring services passed Math 100.
  - Surveys, focus groups, interviews:
    - Not just satisfaction, but “Did our service/program help you learn/do X?”
  - Use and attendance (clients “vote with their feet”)
  - Compliance with research-based standards or best practice (research suggests that following practices X and Y lead to student learning; we follow practices X and Y)

How to Get to Learning Goals

Complete this sentence: What changes would we like to see in our clients as a result of our actions?
**Example of Process Goals ONLY: Campus Security**

*College Mission:* Educate, inspire, and empower students... [to] integrate mind, body, and spirit.

*Unit Mission:* Provide a safe and secure environment for all members of the college community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Goals being Assessed</th>
<th>Means of Assessment and Criteria for Success</th>
<th>Summary of Data Collected</th>
<th>Action to be Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff will be sufficient for day and night coverage</td>
<td>Number of staff; records of day and night coverage. Criterion: 100% coverage</td>
<td>Incomplete coverage</td>
<td>Submit request for hiring part-time officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% of staff will participate in staff development</td>
<td>Attendance records Criterion: 100% participation</td>
<td>90% participation</td>
<td>Chief interviews those who did not attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff will report development was useful</td>
<td>Post-session evaluation Criterion: 80% will report useful</td>
<td>60% report useful. Several suggestions for improvement</td>
<td>Use client suggestions for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief will be involved in campus safety plan</td>
<td>Record of involvement</td>
<td>Chief attended all meetings; campus safety plan is moving forward</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature on personal safety will be distributed to students [in certain places]</td>
<td>Records of literature distributed.</td>
<td>1000 pamphlets were distributed, covering each residence hall, cafeteria, and several places in the Union</td>
<td>Ask students whether they saw/used the pamphlets. Would posters be more effective?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What are the learning goals and how could they be measured?
Example of Learning Goals and Measures: Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal</th>
<th>Measures of the Learning Goal</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will use alcohol and drugs legally and</td>
<td>Completion and pass rates on AlcoholEdu online course &amp; exam</td>
<td>Program staff meet regularly to review assessment results and plan changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wisely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student survey: Did the program help you? Suggestions for</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improvement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcohol –related violations as reported by campus police and</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>residence hall staff</td>
<td></td>
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Example: Library Process Goals

- We will have XYZ resources (print, online, etc.) available
- We will staff the information desk, both in person and by chat, during XYZ hours
- We will lead XYZ first-year-student orientation sessions.
- We will collaborate with faculty to offer library instruction within their classes/assignments
- Etc.

Library Learning Goals

- Students will be able to...
  - Recognize when information is needed
  - Locate, evaluate, and effectively use information
    (Source: www.alal.org. Within the ALA, the website of the ACRL [Association of College and Research Libraries] has five standards, with related assessment measures, for information literacy.)

Measures

1. Surveys of how our program helped them learn (NOT “satisfaction”)
   a. General
   b. Short, point-of-use
2. Focus Groups
3. Interviews
4. Attendance/use (e.g. student use of the exercise equipment, use of the library, attendance at voluntary programs year after year)
5. Behavior
   a. Self-Reported (e.g. reports of alcohol and drug abuse)
b. Observed (e.g. students plan and lead an athletic-related event; staff observe how well they did it)
c. Recorded through available databases (e.g. alcohol-related incidents reported by campus security and residence staff)

6. Test, quiz, assignment, reflection, journal entry, or other student work

**Helpful Language for Learning Goals**

**Seven Categories of Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Cognitive complexity
2. Knowledge acquisition, integration, and application
3. Humanitarianism
4. Civic engagement
5. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal competence
6. Practical competence
7. Persistence and academic achievement


**Four alternative categories:**

**Develop Intellectually**
- Demonstrate the ability to reason both simple and complex issues.
- Utilize both new and existing perspectives in solving problems and in expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.
- Integrate the information they observe and analyze by application in daily life (i.e. decision making, relationships, etc.)

**Develop Personally**
- Develop a healthy sense of identity, self-awareness, and self-confidence
- Demonstrate ethical standards based on established university values
- Identify individual accomplishments they believe contribute to their self-esteem
- Incorporate healthy lifestyle choices in daily living
- Demonstrate the ability to interact and develop relationships with individuals who may have attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles, faith identity, and cultural backgrounds different from their own.
- Demonstrate an interest in exploring their own attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyle, faith identity, and cultural background
- Develop a desire for lifelong learning

**Develop Occupationally for Professional and Personal Life**
- Identify career possibilities that are compatible with their abilities and interests
• Define a career plan consistent with their skills, education and interests
• Be able to communicate effectively using written, spoken, nonverbal language, and technology

Develop Socially
• Demonstrate appropriate skills in resolving conflict
• Work cooperatively with others
• Demonstrate acceptance of the uniqueness of all individuals
• Demonstrate citizenship
• Participate in volunteer activities

Helpful Resources