Spring 2015

Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan: Tips, Techniques, and Resources

Anne Lundquist
*Western Michigan University*, anne.e.lundquist@wmich.edu

Cari Robertson
*Western Michigan University*, cari.robertson@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/assessment_day](http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/assessment_day)

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
[http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/assessment_day/42](http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/assessment_day/42)

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Assessment at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Assessment in Action Conference by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
Assessment in Student Support Units

Definition
“Any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional, departmental or agency effectiveness.”
(Upcraft & Schuh, 2009)

Dimensions
• Needs
• Student learning
• Satisfaction
• Benchmarking
• Operation efficiency
• Participation
• Tracking progress
• Environment/climate/culture
• Program and service outcomes
• Effectiveness against professional standards
WMU Assessment Handbook

Assessment plans have been written for all academic units and are in the process of being written by student support units. Since no single educational or service outcome is common to all units, the plans show the diversity across campus. Different units use various assessment tools as they apply. Assessment plans are not static and can change and evolve as the unit discovers what activities are effective and which are not.
Assessment
Plan Context
Assessment for Accountability or Improvement....or both?

“Adopting either one of these two perspectives will decisively influence institutional choices about what and how to assess, how to organize assessment, and how to communicate assessment results.”

(Peter T. Ewell, 2009, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment).
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)

Overview

The NILOA Reports section directs you to the major research products of NILOA. NILOA undertakes a variety of research projects to examine and improve the quality of student learning outcomes assessment. The site offers a range of resources, including:

- NILOA Reports
- Occasional Papers
- Examples of Good Assessment Practice
- Assessment Literature Archive

Assessment Briefs are short, exclusive case studies to develop a better understanding of what “good work” is in the field of assessment. The Examples feature insights and strategies that are applied to improve assessment data to affect change in teaching and learning or improving their activities and structures in an accessible manner.

"For several months I struggled to teach myself about learning outcomes and assessment in higher education. And then I found NILOA. In one place I found current information and plenty of helpful resources. Its national survey results provide a big picture of higher education. The occasional papers provide thoughtful commentary and analysis, and the tool kit given me excellent descriptive information on assessment measures and links to longer documents. All this was extremely helpful to me and easy to use."

Patricia Creaser
Senior Adviser for Academic Policy
Department of Higher Education
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Student support units should define their mission, establish goals and determine how to measure outcomes associated with those goals so that key processes that meet the needs and expectations of students, parents, employers, faculty and other stakeholders can be improved on a continuous basis.
Costs of Not Measuring Performance in Student Support Units

• Decisions based on assumption rather than fact
• Failure to meet constituent expectations
  – Learning
  – Reliability
  – Efficiency
  – Quality
  – Cost
  – Delivery
• Failure to identify potential improvement areas
• Lack of optimum progress toward organizational vision
Assessment Plans...

- Serve as a unifying template for assessment conversations
- Ensure that assessment is being planned with intention
- Ensure outcomes/assessment results relate to Division or Institutional goals
- Clear and concise way of gathering assessment activity to report up and out
Main Purposes of Assessment

1. **To improve** – The assessment process should provide feedback to determine how the unit can be improved.

2. **To inform** – The assessment process should inform department heads and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the unit to the development, learning and growth of students.

3. **To prove** – The assessment process should encapsulate and demonstrate what the unit is accomplishing to students, faculty, staff and outsiders.

4. **To support** – The assessment process should provide support for campus decision-making activities such as unit review and strategic planning, as well as external accountability activities such as accreditation.
HLC Guiding Value 4: A culture of continuous improvement

The Improvement Life Cycle

- **ANALYZE DATA:** Gather, Record, Study
- **SET GOALS:** Measureable, Achievable
- **PLAN:** Strategies, Resources, Actions
- **IMPLEMENT:** Benchmark Deliverables
- **EVALUATE:** Monitor Success, Adjust
- **WRITE:** Continuous Improvement
HLC Criteria 3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment

1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution’s mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.

2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students’ educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.
HLC Criteria 3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching

- 3D.1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
- 3D.22. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
- 3D.3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students
HLC Criteria 4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing **assessment** of student learning

- 4B.1. The institution has clearly stated **goals** for student learning and effective processes for **assessment** of student learning and achievement of learning **goals**.
- 4B.2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning **outcomes** that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
- 4B.3. The institution uses the information gained from **assessment** to improve student learning.
- 4B.4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of **faculty** and other instructional staff members.
“Accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency are three major concerns of the University’s stakeholders, accrediting agencies, and governmental agencies. These concerns have broadened the scope of the assessment process since the 1990’s. To adequately respond to these concerns, it is important for institutions of higher learning to link assessment processes with strategic planning and budget planning.”

(Roller, Bovee, & Green, 2004)
STUDENT AFFAIRS DIVISION DESIRED FUTURE STATE:
AN INTEGRATED, NON-LINEAR CYCLE
WMU Student Affairs Assessment & Planning Conceptual Framework


**Building A Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs** (Culp & Dungy, 2012): Phases of assessment in the organization (Good intentions, Justification, Strategy, Evidence).

**NASPA/ACPA Assessment, Evaluation & Research (AER) Competencies**: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced.
Learning & Assessment Reconsidered

http://www.sa.ua.edu/documents/LearningReconsidered2_005.pdf
Building a Culture of Evidence

Writing Your Student Support Unit
Assessment Plan
Moving Toward a Culture of Evidence

Culp & Dungy (2012) Building a Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture of Evidence Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentionality</strong> (Thoughtfulness in action or decision)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective</strong> (Relative to position, institutional role and general point of view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Linkages</strong> (Connections that manage movement and relationships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiatives and Directions</strong> (Goals, programs, projects, and plans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning Processes</strong> (Strategic planning, goal setting, measuring outcomes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Assessment, Evaluation, and Research competency area (AER) focuses on the ability to use, design, conduct, and critique qualitative and quantitative AER analyses; to manage organizations using AER processes and the results obtained from them; and to shape the political and ethical climate surrounding AER processes and uses on campus.

https://www.naspa.org/about/student-affairs/assessment-evaluation-and-research
Assessment
Plan
Considerations
Focus on the assessment cycle

Foundational Documents (mission, goals, strategic plan)

Establish Criteria for Success (outcomes or targets)

Use results for Improvement

Provide Programs and Services

Determine Effectiveness

Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan
The Assessment Cycle  (Bresciani, 2006)

The key questions...

- What are we trying to do and why?  
or
- What is my program supposed to accomplish?  
or
- What do I want students to be able to do and/or know as a result of my course/workshop/orientation/program?
- How well are we doing it?
- How do we know?
- How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
- Do the improvements we make contribute to our intended end results?
Common elements

- Statement of mission and goals
- Student learning outcomes and/or program outcomes
- Assessment method(s)
- Assessment measure(s)
- Implementation plan:
  - Timeline
  - Who is responsible for carrying out the assessment
  - Other campus partners
  - Sampling details
FLOWCHART DESCRIBING ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- Step 1: Organize for assessment
- Step 2: Define mission
- Step 3: Define goals
- Step 4: Define student learning outcomes
- Step 5: Inventory existing and needed assessment methods
- Step 6: Identify assessment methods and targets for each learning outcome
- Step 7: Collect the data
- Step 8: Analyze results
- Step 9: Provide feedback
- Step 10: Implement changes
- Step 11: Monitor changes and compare results
- Step 12: Review information

Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan
Assessment is Effective When...

- viewed as a comprehensive, systematic and continuous activity
- viewed as a means for self-improvement
- measures are meaningful
- utilizes multiple measures and multiple sources
- used as a management tool
- results are valued, and are genuinely used to improve units’ structure, services, and processes
- coordinated by one person or a team and reviewed by a committee
- involves the participation and input of all faculty and staff
- includes student involvement

Adapted from University of Central Florida Administrative Unit Assessment Handbook
Performance Indicators

“The key to selecting measures and indicators is asking thoughtful questions about how important accomplishments can be measured in an understandable manner with data that can be collected using a reasonable amount of resources.”


University of North Texas: Key Questions about Outcomes

- Is the outcome under the control of the unit?
- Is the outcome stated in terms of what the unit will accomplish or what its clients should “think, know or do” after receiving a service?
- Will the outcome lead to improved service?
- Is the outcome linked to a service described in the unit’s mission statement?
## University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

### Examples of Assessment Methods and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys of customer satisfaction</th>
<th>Analysis of error rates, processing time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gap analyses; delivered services vs. actual requirements</td>
<td>Publications and presentations; citation counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups, individual interviews, phone surveys</td>
<td>External funds awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal feedback from advisory groups or committees</td>
<td>Percentage of target stakeholders served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollar value to the local economy (e.g., research)</td>
<td>Compliance with industry standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparisons to best practices in the profession</td>
<td>Benchmarking with peer institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds raised in response to outreach efforts</td>
<td>Student success rates (e.g., employment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of service usage</td>
<td>Achievement of milestones towards strategic goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of website hits and downloads</td>
<td>Audit reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of requests for services fulfilled</td>
<td>External reviews by consultants or accrediting bodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Steps to Develop an Assessment Plan

1. Organize for assessment.
2. Define/clarify unit mission.
3. Define/clarify goals of the unit.
4. Define/clarify outcomes of the unit (operational, student learning).
5. Identify performance criteria for each outcome.
6. Inventory existing and needed assessment methods.
7. Determine how assessment results will be used for improvement and change.
8. Establish a schedule for the above steps.
9. Write the assessment plan.
10. Submit the plan to UASC.
11. Implement the plan: collect data, review/analyze data, use the data for decision-making on the determined schedule.
12. Share results.

Adapted from University of Central Florida Administrative Unit Assessment Handbook
WMU Assessment Plan Elements & Process

Western Michigan University
UASC Assessment Plan Process

• University Assessment Steering Committee (UASC)
  – Promotes and supports assessment of student learning and development
  – Recommends assessment policy and plans for WMU
  – Guides assessment plan development for both degree granting units and student support units

• Consultation and Review Team (CART)
  – Evaluates assessment plans
  – Provides feedback and resource links
  – Recommends approval at UASC meetings
UASC Recommendations for Assessment Plans

• Assessment plans identify the structure, timeline and uses of assessment within the unit
• Plans are dynamic documents that change to reflect lessons learned from assessment results as well as advances in the discipline
• Plans should be continuously reviewed and formally updated at least every five years
• Timelines for and quantity of assessment activities need to be feasible in order to close the loop on making quality learning/program/service improvement
UASC Recommendations for Assessment Plans (continued)

• Plans should include:
  – Clear statements of intended outcomes with criteria for success (at least one SLO for SSUs)
  – Multiple measures to determine the extent to which intended outcomes are met
  – Direct measures of SLO are preferred over indirect
    • Indirect measures
      – “Tell me if you learned “ (ex: survey questions rating learning with Likert scale or yes/no answers)
    • Direct measures
      – “Show me what you learned” (ex: survey questions with multiple choice/fill in the blank answers; rubrics for reflection activities or interviews)
### Criteria for UASC Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for UASC Review</th>
<th>Marginal or Missing</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Goals or Program Objectives Are Stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Student Learning, Development or Process Outcomes are Stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Means of Assessment (Assessment Methods) Are Identified for Each Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Success Are Included for Each Means of Assessment (Method)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Groups or Customers Served by the Unit are Identified and Described</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline for Data Collection is Appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Uses of Assessment Data Are Indicated in Narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the Assessment Plan is Described (Assessment Evaluation in TracDat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment Plan Assistance

www.wmich.edu/assessment

Resources and Assistance

WMU Assessment Handbook
Assessment of Student Learning Handbook: "Celebrating Student Learning"

Workshops and Conferences

Assessment in Action Day
- WMU Assessment in Action Conference 2015

Assessment Conferences
- AAC & U General Education and Assessment: Disruptions, Innovations, and Opportunities
- Annual Assessment Institute, Indianapolis IN (October 25-27, 2015)
- More Assessment Conferences

More Information