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: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/assessment_day

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons

**WMU ScholarWorks Citation**

https://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 wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan: Tips, Techniques, and Resources

Anne Lundquist, Director of Student Affairs Strategic Planning and Assessment

Cari Robertson, Director of Health Promotion and Education, Sindecuse & University Assessment Steering Committee (UASC), Chair
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
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 outputs of NILOA. NILOA undertakes a variety of original research projects to examine the depth and breadth of student learning outcomes assessment at accredited colleges and universities across the United States. Located in Occasional Papers, are reports commissioned by NILOA that examine contemporary issues and inform the academic community of the current state-of-the-art in assessing learning outcomes in American Higher Education.

Our Transparency Framework is a tool developed by NILOA intended to help institutions evaluate the extent to which they are making evidence of student accomplishment readily accessible and potentially useful and meaningful to various audiences.

Examples of Good Assessment Practice are short, indicative case studies to develop a better understanding of what “good work” is that is related to assessment. Data-informed improvement and transparency at the institutional level. The Examples feature concepts and strategies that appear to be useful at assessment and how to develop assessment tools to affect changes in teaching and learning or reporting their activities and findings in an accessible manner.

Commissioned Assessment Briefs provide a succinct, informative guide on the nature and practical use of assessment evidence that is targeted to a particular audience, as well as content for faculty and student affairs professionals are available.

Under Assessment Literature Archive, readers will find links to past assessment articles as well as the latest issue of the AAHE’s Principles and their continuing relevance today.

Measuring Quality is an online inventory of assessment resources, presented in partnership with AIR and ACP, discussions assist.

"For several months I struggled to teach myself about learning outcomes and assessment in higher education. And then in October 2003 I found NILOA. In one place, I found current information and plenty of helpful resources. As a national survey results provide a big picture, the occasional papers provide thoughtful commentary and analysis, and the tool kit gives me consistent encouraging information on assessment measures and links to longer documents. All this was extremely helpful to me and easy to use.”

Patricia Creason
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.

Adapted from University of Central Florida Administrative Unit Assessment Handbook
HLC Guiding Value 4: A culture of continuous improvement

The Improvement Life Cycle

ANALYZE DATA: Gather, Record, Study

SET GOALS: Measureable, Achievable

EVALUATE: Monitor Success, Adjust

PLAN: Strategies, Resources, Actions

IMPLEMENT: Benchmark Deliverables

Continuous Improvement

Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan
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

**Culture of Evidence.**
*Advanced AER Competencies*

**Culture of Good Intentions and Justification.**
*Basic AER Competencies*

**Culture of Strategy.**
*Intermediate AER Competencies*

---

**Assessment Reconsidered**

**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
Moving Toward a Culture of Evidence

Culp & Dungy (2012) Building a Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs
## Culture of Evidence Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A Culture of Good Intentions</th>
<th>A Culture of Justification</th>
<th>A Culture of Strategy</th>
<th>A Culture of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentionality</strong></td>
<td>People have a sense that they are doing good things.</td>
<td>People can describe what they are doing (i.e. operational or procedural specificity).</td>
<td>People can describe what they are accomplishing (i.e. strategic pertinence, how what they are doing relates to mission and goals).</td>
<td>People know that they are doing the right things and can describe why they are doing them, and what they are accomplishing through them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Incidental / Opportunistic. Recognize data is important, but do not make any particular efforts to collect it.</td>
<td>After-the-Fact. Data is used retroactively as justification for predetermined positions or prior decisions.</td>
<td>Before-the-fact. Assessment is designed with an end in mind. (e.g. identification of learning outcomes, how the data will be used)</td>
<td>Real Time / Continuous. Data is collected and regularly used to inform processes. Data helps us close the loop on improvement processes and educational outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Linkages</strong></td>
<td>Unclear / Opaque. Data, when collected, is not shared beyond assessors, so connections cannot be made.</td>
<td>Cloudy. Assessment conducted from a defensive posture, especially related to questions of budgetary and operational efficiency.</td>
<td>Translucent. Assessment understood and shared, but only with allies or key partners. Scope is limited to mid-managers.</td>
<td>Clear / Transparent. Outsiders can see and understand contributions to student and institutional success. Assessment is shared with all stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiatives and Directions</strong></td>
<td>Determined by whim, interest, opportunity.</td>
<td>Administration initiates assessment and it is done only when asked for or required.</td>
<td>Directors own and initiate assessment. Data describe the current situation.</td>
<td>All stakeholders own assessment. Success is operationalized, concretely described, and evaluated based on evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning Processes</strong></td>
<td>Vague and individualized. Success is vague or interpretive, and evaluated based on “feel,” intent and effort. Collective or strategic planning does not exist.</td>
<td>Sporadic and limited to immediate question or application. Data linked retroactively to strategic context, goals, expectations, etc. but not planning-oriented.</td>
<td>Organized, routinized, and localized. Data informs deliberate cyclical or episodic strategic planning exercises.</td>
<td>Ongoing, strategic and clearly linked to past and future. Triangulation of findings through multiple/established assessments. Data incorporated into continuous strategic thinking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NASPA/ACPA Assessment, Evaluation & Research Competencies

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)
- Provide Programs and Services
- Determine Effectiveness
- Use results for Improvement
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

PLAN
DO
ACT
CHECK

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

Writing Your Student Support Unit Assessment Plan
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?
### Examples of Assessment Methods and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method/Source</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys of customer satisfaction</td>
<td>Analysis of error rates, processing time</td>
</tr>
<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
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)
<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 Information