



## **Assessment Planning: Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes**

This resource provides information, ideas, and brainstorming worksheets to assist programs in choosing assessment methods.

The programs at FIT that are the most successful with assessment fine tune methods that can be used on a regular basis so that assessment becomes part of their regular practices. The Executive Director of Assessment and the Faculty Assessment Fellows provide written feedback on assessment reports to assist programs in improving methods.

### **Making Assessment Manageable**

Planning ahead helps programs make assessment efficient and more manageable in terms of faculty time. Here are some ways to design a manageable process:

- Use existing student assignments/projects and academic milestones whenever possible, since these are embedded in the curriculum. Student work that is optional or extra-credit may not provide reliable information about learning (e.g. due to lacks of representativeness of student volunteers or motivational issues)
  - Programs can use curriculum maps to identify courses where student work at a particular level can be collected for assessment.
- Use existing program processes for evaluating students as assessment methods, such as annual student performance review, department meetings that discuss student learning, and cluster reviews. Programs may need to make some changes to these practices to adapt them for thinking about a group of students (instead of individuals) or to document them differently.
- Bundle the assessment of learning outcomes where it makes sense. Students may demonstrate multiple learning outcomes in the same assignment or project, and these can be assessed together. Capstone projects in particular usually require students to demonstrate several learning outcomes at once, integrating their learning into a single product.
- Sample student work *when it makes sense*. Sampling must be done cautiously in order to ensure that the student work is representative of the program and provides reliable information to faculty.
- Manage assessment so that the grading practices instructors already employ can be used as a source of assessment evidence. For example, faculty may complete rubrics to grade students, and these rubrics can be aggregated to provide assessment information.

## Selecting Assessment Methods

There are many ways to examine student achievement of learning outcomes. Listed below are methods that are likely to be used by FIT programs. Many of these methods are already used at FIT, although they may not be documented.

In most years, programs should choose a “direct” method of assessment – one in which faculty, or appropriate experts, examine student work. There are many ways programs can assess student learning, and not all of them are listed here. Programs can work with Carolyn Comiskey, Executive Director of Assessment, to brainstorm other methods, or to adapt current methods to meet FIT requirements.

Over time, a combination of direct and indirect methods, both qualitative and quantitative, often provides a clear picture of student learning, but note that it is NOT necessary for a program to select ANY quantitative methods if they do not find them useful.

### Direct (Clear and Compelling) Evidence of What Students Are Learning

- “Capstone” experiences such as research projects, presentations, theses, dissertations, oral defenses, exhibitions (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Portfolios of student work (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Student assignments or projects from required courses (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Faculty “cluster review” or discussion of student work (when related to program learning outcomes for the cohort and documented)
- Observations of student behavior (e.g., presentations, group discussions), undertaken and with notes recorded systematically
- Summaries/analyses of electronic discussion threads
- Scores on multiple choice and/or essay tests in key courses, accompanied by test “blueprints” that match exam questions to student learning outcomes
- Ratings of student skills (that are also learning outcomes) by field experience/internship supervisors or employers
- Student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs, if developing those are intended outcomes of the program

### Indirect Evidence of Student Learning

- Assignment grades, if not accompanied by a rubric or scoring guide
- Student ratings of their knowledge and skills
- Student/alumni satisfaction with their learning, collected through surveys, senior exit interviews, or focus groups
- Placement rates of graduates into appropriate career positions and starting salaries
- Alumni perceptions of their career responsibilities and satisfaction
- Honors, awards, and scholarships earned by students and alumni

*Adapted from: Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education*

## **Comprehensive Assessment Over Time**

It is not necessary to assess every program learning outcome every year. Depending on the assessment plan, this might make sense; for example, if student capstone projects demonstrate all of the PLOs, why not assess them all every year to track over time? If program learning outcomes are demonstrated in different classes, through different assignments, it might make sense to rotate assessments. Programs should assess each of their learning outcomes at least once during every three years.

Student learning is complex and multi-faceted, and it is difficult to adequately capture in a single method. Therefore, the use of multiple methods is recommended over time. At FIT, many programs supplement the direct examination of student work with indirect information from exit surveys, job placement information, and more.

## Program Assessment Planning Worksheets

These two exercises are designed to assist programs in brainstorming possible methods for assessing student learning. Assessment works best when it addresses real questions faculty have about student learning, to gather information in order to make programmatic decisions. The first grid guides faculty in connecting their questions about learning to assessment methods. Since program learning outcomes list what program faculty members think is most important for students to learn, assessing student learning should focus upon these areas. The second exercise is to foster brainstorming of possible methods for assessing learning outcomes. Both of these exercises will help program faculty design the comprehensive assessment plan.

### 1. Program Questions about Student Learning

<b>Questions About Student Learning:</b> List questions that faculty have about student learning in their programs	<b>Why?</b> Is there a reason for asking this question? What will the program do with this information?	<b>How?</b> Brainstorm possible methods that the program could use to answer this question
<i>Example: Faculty want to know whether course FIT250, taken in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the Bachelor's program, is adequate preparation for FIT550, taken in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester.</i>	<i>Example: Some faculty teaching FIT550 feel that students are unprepared in two areas (program learning outcomes 4 and 5). They aren't sure whether FIT 250 hasn't prepared students or whether students have forgotten the skills by FIT 550. The program is considering revising FIT250.</i>	<i>Example: Faculty teaching FIT250 and FIT550 could create a rubric, apply to student work in FIT250, and analyze results together; Faculty could use a curriculum map to analyze where program learning outcomes 4 and 5 are reinforced in semesters 2 and 3; etc.</i>

### 2. Methods for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes

In the first column, list program learning outcomes. In the next column, "Learning Opportunities," note the courses and, when possible, assignments in which students have opportunities to learn and practice the outcome. The information in this column can assist

faculty in thinking about the possible assessment methods to list in the third column, for methods the program currently uses or could use for collecting information as to how students are mastering the learning outcomes. Refer to the *Evidence of Student Learning* resource for a list of possible methods.

<b>Program Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Learning Opportunities (Courses/ Projects)</b>	<b>Potential Assessment Methods</b>
List program learning outcomes below	In what course(s) do students learn, practice and reinforce the outcome? Where in the curriculum (or external activity) do they best demonstrate it? (it is useful to refer to the curriculum map)	What evidence could faculty collect to determine whether students have mastered the outcome? Does this evidence already exist as part of students' regular coursework or other activities?

Insert Rows as Needed