

Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes in Student Affairs

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Purpose

- Enhance understanding of psychometric & design considerations involved in student outcome assessment
- Develop ways to measure student learning & development
- Estimate the effects of college on students using measurable learning & development objectives
- Evaluate program/service effectiveness & judge results

What is assessment?

- “Process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, & using information to increase students’ learning & development. It includes discussions re: what should be assessed and how the info will be used..”

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2006). *Frameworks for Assessing Learning & Development Outcomes*. p.19.

Two Purposes of Assessment

- Program & Service improvement (e.g. contributions to students and/or institutional mission)
- Accountability (e.g. results should be used to improve or reshape programs/services, policies, & overall institution)

Assessment Plans

- Successful assessment includes:
 - Clear, obtainable goals (SMART)
 - Measurable outcomes
 - Meaningful & accurate data
 - Appropriate methods & techniques
 - Instructions for disseminating results
- SMART goals – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reliable, and Timely

Assessment Process

- Refers to the procedures & tasks in conducting an assessment project
 - Who is your target audience?
 - What do you hope to learn/know?
 - Who is conducting the study?
 - How will it be funded?
 - What methodology is best?
 - How will the study be conducted?
 - How do you plan to use the results?

Fundamental questions

- What do I hope students are learning from or how is he/she developing through this program/service?
- How does this program/service connect to the larger institutional mission?
- What aspects of the program/service are effective? What needs improvement and how?
- How does college affect students?

Methodologies

- Represent different ways of knowing
- Quantitative
 - Assigns numbers & symbols to constructs of interest – known as variables. View knowledge as objective & knowable.
 - e.g. Instruments measuring attitudes & behaviors
- Qualitative
 - Assumption that knowledge is socially constructed & not wholly describable & controllable.
 - e.g. Case study, historical inquiry via field observations, open-ended interviews

Sample methodologies

- Impact of college on students' spirituality – use grounded theory (GT) method to analyze interviews or focus groups. (GT emphasizes generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research.)
- Students' perceptions regarding mental health services – create & use an instrument to measure levels of satisfaction, length of treatment, referrals, & counselor helpfulness.

Technical Issues of Assessment (1/2)

- Reliability – the degree to which an indicator or instrument provides the same information consistently (Neuman, 1994) (Quantitative)
- Trustworthiness – the degree to which the researcher’s findings are credible. Uses peer de-briefing, member checking, and piloting one’s protocol prior to collecting data to establish trustworthiness. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (Qualitative)

Technical Issues of Assessment (2/2)

- Validity – extent to which an instrument actually measures what it purports to measure.
- Sampling –
 - Quantitative - “fragment represents the whole”
 - Qualitative – Generalizability is not a goal, but sampling must be consistent with inquiry.

Area Assessments

- Office of the Dean of Student Affairs
- Campus Life & FYE
- Career & Graduate Development
- Counseling & Consultation Center
- Disability Services
- Health Services
- Religious Life
- Residence Life

Area Assessments

- What is the research phenomenon?
- What is the best way to gather the data (methodology)?
- How will you gather the data?
- Who are the potential participants? How do you encourage participation?
- How do you plan to use the results?

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- Strayhorn, T., Creamer, D.G., Miller, T., Arminio, J. (2006). *Frameworks for assessing learning and development outcomes*. Washington DC: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.