Student Learning Outcomes Assessment
FAQs

Why are we doing assessment? *Assessment is how we ensure that our courses and programs are leading to the learning that we intend. We also have an obligation to be accountable to the public and our accrediting bodies for our claims about student learning; engagement in ongoing and sustained assessment of student learning is a key standard that our accreditors require that we meet.*

What is the "assessment cycle?" *The assessment cycle is comprised of reflection on three questions.*

- *What are we trying to do? (learning outcomes)*
- *How well are we doing? (review of evidence of learning)*
- *How can we improve? (reflection on what pedagogical and/or curricular changes might improve student learning)*

Who is the audience for our assessment? *While the College has an obligation to be accountable to the public and our accrediting bodies for our claims about student learning, the primary audience is you and others in your department. Through assessment you are answering the question, "How can we improve?"*

What is the relationship of a program's assessment report to its annual report and its Program Review Self-Study? *The assessment report is submitted each year as an appendix to a program's annual report. As an appendix, the assessment report can be shared with groups such as the institutional Assessment Committee without those groups also seeing the details of a program's annual report which might contain sensitive information. Both the assessment reports and annual reports will be used as source material for the completion of a program's Self-Study as part of Program Review which occurs every five to eight years.*

Are assessment results used in the evaluation of faculty/staff? *No.*

Is assessment all about finding problems? *No. Assessment is about finding out "how well are we doing relative to our learning outcomes?" The answer to that question may be that your students are demonstrating mastery of your learning outcomes at a level that you find acceptable. In other words, you may—and likely will in many cases—find that your program/curriculum is functioning as it ought to and there are no substantial changes in pedagogy/curriculum needed.*

What is the difference between indirect and direct evidence? *Indirect evidence is perceptions about learning (e.g. survey data, focus groups, internship supervisor's report, etc.). Direct evidence is observable behaviors or products (e.g. creative works, portfolios, reflection essays, passage rates on an exam, etc.).*

What is embedded evidence? *Embedded evidence is produced during the normal course of a program (e.g. assignments or activities in a class). This is different from evidence that is produced for the sole purpose of program assessment. It is generally acknowledged that embedded evidence is preferred for program assessment since students who are being evaluated for a grade are motivated to produce their best work.*

Why aren't grades acceptable assessment data? *Grades typically do not provide the information necessary to answer the question "How can we improve?" which is the ultimate purpose of assessment.*

Can I use survey data like the Graduating Student Survey (GSS) or Course Evaluations as evidence of student learning? *Yes. You are encouraged to use multiple sources of data for assessment of learning. For outcomes that are dispositions, surveys and other indirect data may be the best and only sources of evidence of learning. However, surveys and other indirect evidence alone are not sufficient for the assessment of outcomes that are cognitive or performative.*

At what point in the course of a program should assessment evidence be collected? *The timing for summative assessment is dependent on the type of the outcome.*

- ***Absolute Standard outcomes:*** *Evidence is collected near or at the end of the program (e.g. senior year or second semester of the junior year.)*
- ***Value Added Achievement outcomes*****:** *Evidence is collected at two points in time; near the beginning and at the end of the program. Note the evidence must be collected from the same students at both points in time and each student's performance pre- and post- is compared.*

If you have additional questions about learning outcomes, see Understanding Learning Outcomes and Writing and Aligning Learning Outcomes.

What is an appropriate sample size when collecting evidence for assessment? In most cases a program is not *going to be running statistical tests on their assessment data and so sample size as it relates to statistical power is moot. If a program wishes to conduct statistical tests and/or publish the results of their assessment in a reputable academic journal, the sample size will need to conform to statistical standards related to confidence intervals. The acceptable sample size for our internal purposes will differ based on the number of students in the program and the feasibility of the assessment task.*

- *Programs with small numbers of students (20 or fewer) from whom they can collect evidence for outcomes assessment (typically juniors and seniors) should endeavor to gather evidence from all students. These programs may need to amass evidence across a number of years before they can answer the question "how well are we doing relative to our learning outcomes?" with confidence.*
- *For programs with larger numbers of students, if the evidence is relatively simple to assess (e.g. passage rates on an exam, response to survey questions, etc.) the program should include all of the evidence that is available. For assessments that are more laborious, such as portfolio reviews, the program should gather evidence from a reasonable number of students that provides for a feasible engagement in assessment and allows faculty/staff to answer the question "how well are we doing relative to our learning outcomes?" with confidence.*

How do I select a sample of student work? *First determine how many students will be represented in your sample then select every Nth student from a listing of all students. For example, if you have 50 total students and you want to include 10 of them in your assessment, select every 5^{th} student from a listing of all 50 students. If embedded evidence is being used from a course that has multiple sections, ensure that the sample is draw from across the sections and not from a single section.*

If student work is being assessed using a rubric, how many reviewers are needed? *Two reviewers are needed for each piece of student work. If the results of the review of a piece of work differ by more than 1 point on any element of a rubric (e.g. Reviewer A rates a work as a 4 and Reviewer B rates it as a 2 on an element on the rubric) a third reviewer is needed* <u>*for that piece of work*</u> *(not for the entire sample).*

Should reviewers consult with each other when assessing student work? *Ideally, reviews of student work will be conducted independently. Reviewers should "norm" a rubric prior to engaging in full assessment. Norming involves all reviewers rating a few selections of student work and then comparing and talking about their ratings to ensure that they are interpreting the rubric in the same way. Rubrics that contain clear definitions that distinguish levels of performance/competence and are normed will typically reduce the need for a third reviewer.*

Who do I talk to if I need to hire someone to serve as an additional reviewer? *You should talk to your Associate Dean or Vice Provost.*

If I know the student who produced the evidence I am assessing, does that invalidate the assessment? *No. it is impractical and, in many cases, impossible for assessment at MICA to be truly "blind." Those doing the assessment are encouraged to follow rubrics and scoring guides closely in order to reduce any bias that may occur as a result of knowing the students who produced the evidence.*

Does assessment of first-year students and/or early courses count? *Yes and no. Each faculty member has an obligation to assess whether their courses are effective in preparing students to meet their course learning outcomes and programs have an obligation to assess the whole of the curriculum, which includes early courses. Efforts in these areas though do not satisfy the programs' and the College's obligation to be accountable to the public and our accrediting bodies for our claims about student learning. We cannot focus on early courses and the acquisition of course learning outcomes to the exclusion of examining whether at the end of a program students possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that have been defined as the program's learning outcomes.*

If you have a question that you would like answered and added to this list, please email that question to Terra Schehr, Associate Vice President for Educational Planning & Development at tschehr@mica.edu.