



Is There a Common Language for Talking About Assessment?

One of the first and most important steps an institution can take when it comes to starting an assessment initiative is clarifying the terminology. To date, there is no universal language of assessment. Terms used to describe assessment processes and ideas vary across accrediting organizations, colleges and universities, disciplines, and programs. Terms such as *objectives*, *outcomes*, *competencies*, *dispositions*, *goals*, *indicators*, *measures*, *tools*, and *methods* all appear in assessment literature, often referring to concepts that are defined differently in another source. It will continue to be difficult to talk about assessment until there is some agreement among program faculty (and, ideally, across an entire institution), as to what terms are going to be used.

Glossary of Terms in use at GU - *We want to be consistent with our terms on syllabi, program documents, assessment reports.*

A

Achievement – The measure of the quality and/or the quantity of the success one has in the mastery of objectives. Usually refers to successfully performing a certain threshold of knowledge, skills, or values.

Action words/verbs – When creating learning objectives, it is best to avoid vague goals and use concrete and objectively-measurable action words. This is not only clarifying to the student, but will help to streamline assessment. Use Bloom’s taxonomy to help appropriate action words for your course level. Good assessment practices call for using just one action verb per learning objective, and avoiding writing assignment descriptions as course objectives. See [Instructions for Creating Program Objectives](#) on Campus Services for more information.

Aligning objectives – Curriculum and learning objectives are aligned or matched to ensure that every student is provided appropriate learning opportunities in order to achieve the identified learning objectives or goal that has been articulated.

Alumni assessment – Alumni can help contribute to assessment data by describing their post-graduation experiences and personal reflections of their education. They can also note how well they believe their education accurately prepared them for further education or work preparedness.

Assessment – The ongoing process of:

- establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning
- ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes.
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches expectations
- Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning

Assessment method – A variety of ways to measure student assignments for achievement of objectives. These methods can include quantitative methods of measurement (e.g. grading, scoring, ranking, etc.) or qualitative methods (reflective writing, etc.).

Assessment plan – The assessment plan guides the selection and creation of student-focused assessment activities across the curriculum in order to improve our education programs. This plan, in coordination with institutional assessment policies, should provide guidance to department and program faculty for selecting appropriate course-based assessment activities that align with learning objectives. This plan should be centered on:

- Objectives to be achieved
- Performance levels to be attained related to those objectives
- Methods for analyzing the performance results
- Describing how the results will be used for improvement

B

Best practices in assessment – The Office of Assessment has created a database for articles, websites, and books that can help with each program’s assessment processes.

These are housed within Campus Services [here](#).

Bloom’s taxonomy – Commonly used discussion of the six levels of learning that occur. According to Bloom, knowledge increases as one progresses through the levels of learning, where knowledge is the most surface level and evaluation represents the deepest form of learning. The Taxonomy has been considered very useful in defining learning-outcome statements.

- ***Knowledge*** - To know specific facts, terms, concepts, principles or theories;
- ***Comprehension*** - To be able to understand, interpret, compare and contrast, explain;
- ***Application*** - To apply knowledge to new situations, to solve problems;
- ***Analysis*** - To identify the organizational structure of something; to identify parts, relationship and organizing principles;
- ***Synthesis*** - To create something, to integrate ideas into a solution, to propose an action plan, to propose a new classification scheme;
- ***Evaluation*** - To judge the quality of something based on its adequacy, value, logic or use

C

Campus Services – A server that GU utilizes; contains a “Solutions” page where many forms, templates, and instructions for Assessment and Institutional Research are held for public access. You can find Campus Service’s Institutional Assessment [here](#).

Check-up reports – Documents that the Office of Assessment utilizes to assure that all courses in a program/department are up to date with current syllabus and assessment standards. These should be filled out by a program coordinator or department chair.

Closing the loop – The final part of the assessment process, when assessment results that have been gathered and analyzed are acted upon. The assessment data is turned back into program improvement.

Cocurricular assessment – Learning takes place outside of academic programs, as well. This means that each cocurricular program should have goals (e.g. to develop attitudes, skills, or values) for student learning that are objective and measurable.

Competency set – In the Assessment portion of D2L, the system codes the overall set of course and/or objectives as a competency set. Competency is another term to describe learning objectives.

Competency-based assessment – Students will be evaluated against a specific learning, behavior, or performance objective. This objective is a “competency” that is clearly established in the curriculum and represents an expected level of. Expertise or mastery of skills, knowledge, or values. Greenville University assessment is competency-based.

Course-embedded assessment – A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the learning process. This process of gathering data on student learning during the educational experience, is designed to help the instructor

determine which concepts or skills the students are not learning well. The professor can then take steps to improve the students' learning while the course is still in session, or for following classes.

Course evaluations – Course evaluations are done online at

<https://greenville.iasystem.org/>. Course evaluations will be done for every class with more than one student, as they are an integral part to course-level and program-level assessment. Results for course evaluations are used to foster program quality discussions, and for knowing how to improve student learning.

Culture of assessment – A subset of organizational culture that fosters good assessment practices. The four keys to fostering a culture of assessment:

- Value campus culture and history
- Respect and empower people, especially faculty
- Value innovation and risk taking, especially in improving teaching
- Value assessment efforts, especially by supporting them with appropriate resources and infrastructure and using the results to inform important decisions on important goals

Curriculum map – This is a document that displays how program objectives are staged across the curriculum. Program objectives need at least 3 touch points in the curriculum, e.g. Introduced (I) to student for first time, Developed (D) in subsequent experiences, and when student has Mastered (M) that objective.

D

Data-driven evidence – Evidence that is backed by data, which informs and influences strategy.

Departments - Still exist as an administrative unit, but are not needed as a layer in assessment planning. Since some departments offered are composed of a single program (major), program and department are redundant. When multiple programs exist within a department, assessment planning must treat each program separately and describe the unique objectives and assessment methods applicable to that discipline.

Direct evidence/assessment – Evidence of student learning that is tangible, visible, self-explanatory, and compelling evidence of exactly what students have and have not learned. Some examples include test questions, supervisor evaluations, papers, presentations, portfolios, capstone experiences.

E

Emphases or Tracks - Within a program. Our best understanding of HLC requirements in this area suggests that we should cease referring to specialized pathways within a program. The new guidelines seem to treat a track/emphasis as a separate program, thus requiring a separate assessment plan and a designated full-time faculty member.

End-of-Year and End-of-Semester reports – Reports that Greenville utilizes to assess each program at the end of Spring and Fall semesters. These reports help outline what was changed in curriculum design to improve student learning, summarizes the student outcome data (achievement of objectives, course evaluations, FCARs etc.), and plan what will change in the future to improve the program and student learning.

F

Faculty Course Assessment Reports (FCARs) – A course-based assessment report to summarize student achievement of objectives and reflect upon program and curriculum implications. They should be housed at the program to be used when completing End-of-Semester and End-of-Year reports. Every course with more than one student should have an FCAR completed for it.

Formative assessment – Assessments of learning processes that are undertaken while student is taking place rather than at the end of a course or program. Because they are done midstream, they can be used for faculty to improve the learning of current students. Formative assessments are represented by “I” and “D” on the curriculum map. Greenville University encourages faculty to monitor formative assessment.

G

General Education assessment – General education curriculum must be assessed outside of the programs that house the courses being taught. General education has overarching goals and because those goals are integrated, they are the hallmark of every undergraduate’s education at the college. Those goals are addressed repeatedly in multiple rather than single general education courses, and the assessment of general education focuses on those goals.

Graduate Learning Objectives (GLOs) – The student learning objectives for graduate programs at Greenville University.

H

Harford Award – A monetary assessment award that is presented to at least one academic department every year, for showcasing and documenting good assessment practices.

Recipients of the Harford Award are judged based off of a rubric.

HLC – The Higher Learning Commission, and Greenville University’s regional accrediting body. The next comprehensive visit will be in 2019.

I

IASystem – An online course evaluation system that Greenville University uses. Faculty can sign in with their D2L username and password to view their course evaluations at <https://greenville.iasystem.org/faculty>.

Indirect evidence/assessment – Evidence of student learning that consists of proxy signs that students are probably learning. Indirect learning is less clear and less convincing than direct evidence. Some examples include course and assignment grades, retention and graduation rates, alumni perceptions.

Institutional assessment – An on-going process designed to monitor and determine the extent to which curricular, co-curricular, and institutional areas and processes support the achievement of student learning objectives as defined by the mission of the college.

Institutional Research (IR) – Office dedicated to identifying information needs; collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data and information; planning and evaluating; serving as stewards of data and information; and educating information producers, users, and consumers.

Institutional Research for Improvement (IRI) – A course within D2L that is open for

faculty members only. This course contains dropboxes for assessment items (e.g. FCARs, End-of-Semester reports, End-of-Year reports, Operational Plans, etc.); materials to aid in the process of assessment (e.g. templates, instructions, guides, etc.); and news items about current assessment items and tasks.

J

Jotform – Fillable forms that the Office of Assessment uses for: applying for a course to be a general education course; modifying course/program objectives, and applying to create a course.

L

Learning objectives vs Learning outcomes - The current version of our assessment documents in use the term “objectives” rather than “outcomes”. “Learning Objectives are general statements about what you hope your students will gain from your program or major. They serve as the purpose toward which specific classroom and other activities are directed. Objectives are written in measurable terms, but are substantiated in courses and with specific assignments. The three main types of objectives in use at Greenville are **knowledge, skill, and attitudes.**”

- **Knowledge objectives** – try to define the main concepts (e.g. theoretical principles, discipline knowledge, etc.) that students must know when they graduate
- **Skill objectives** – try to describe the larger skills (e.g. problem solving, analysis, etc.) that students have gained by the time they graduate

- **Value objectives** – try to describe beliefs about the nature of a field of study or subject matter, perceptions about interdisciplinary connections, ethics, or expression of one’s Christian faith

Learning objective alignment worksheet - This is a new version of the Curriculum Alignment worksheet we have been using in the last couple years. Changes include deleting the “Department Objectives” column, and adding a “Level of Mastery” column.

M

Program vs Major – Most commonly we use the term “major” in reference to the course of study our students are pursuing, the degree they are getting, and the subject area we teach in. D2L uses the term “program” in the way we use the word “major”. Please use the term “Program Assessment” to refer to the assessment activities happening within your major.

Mission statement – A description of the goals of an institution, department, or curriculum, and also supports the Institutional Mission. All programs (both academic and cocurricular) must have their own individual program mission statement. Please refer to the document “Creating an Academic Program Mission Statement” to create a mission statement.

N

NILOA – The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. The NILOA Transparency Framework is the assessment method that Greenville University uses. The Transparency Framework helps institutions to evaluate the extent to which they are making evidence of student accomplishment readily accessible and potentially useful and

meaningful to various audiences.

NSSE – The National Survey of Student Engagement, a survey that collects information on first-year and senior students’ participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. Greenville University participates in NSSE every 3 years, and is in a consortium with CCC&U schools to see comparison between students’ results.

O

Objectives – Same as learning objective. Objectives are measurable goals that describe what a student should gain through a certain course or program.

P

Parceling items out – This term refers to assignments that are connected to multiple course objectives in the objective alignment chart. In order to properly assess assignments that are linked to multiple course objectives, these assignments need to be parceled out into separate items in the gradebook, according to their linkages.

Program assessment*Error! Bookmark not defined.* – An ongoing process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Faculty develop explicit statements of what students should learn, verify that the program is designed to foster this learning, collect empirical data that indicate student attainment, and use these data to improve student learning.

Program coordinator – The program coordinator is a faculty member who has oversight of a program. The coordinator is in charge of assuring good assessment within their program. This includes making sure that FCARs and End-of-Semester/Year

reports are done, stored in a safe location within the program, and submitted to appropriate dropboxes. Program coordinators are also in charge of curriculum improvement, which includes approving all modifications to course objectives and overseeing implementations of course curriculum changes from course evaluations.

Program Operational Plan – All curricular and cocurricular programs on campus must have and implement a comprehensive operational plan. These plans are an internal document that guides each program’s assessment activities and general program operations, and an external document that informs stakeholders and evaluators how Greenville University defines, measures, and documents students’ achievement of learning objectives. Operational plans will operate for three to five years, then will be reevaluated based upon the data generated by the plan. At least once per year, the program staff will meet to consider the evidence regarding the program objectives, and to consider how well the operational plan is serving the goals and objectives of the program.

R

Rubrics – A chart or plan that identifies criteria for evaluating students’ work. Rubrics can be created/added to D2L as an assessment method. Currently, general education is being assessed from rubrics that are based off of Value rubrics.

S

Student Learning Objectives statements (SLOs) – Student learning objectives clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attributes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to require at an institution of higher education. These SLOs also

provide overall direction to all units of the college for developing goals and outcomes.

Streamlined SLOs – Greenville University’s new SLOs. In 2017, the SLOs were ‘streamlined’ from 12 complex objectives into 6 ‘streamlined’ objectives.

Summative assessment – Assessments obtained at the end of a course or program, to show that students have achieved learning objectives. This is considered Mastery (“M”) on the curriculum map, and is often what external accreditors are most interested in.

Surveys – Greenville University participates in several national surveys, as well as creates and administers their own surveys, to measure student participant, engagement, and success. Currently Greenville participates in the following surveys:

- NSSE – given to first-year and senior students to measure student engagement; given once every three years
- Thriving quotient – given to freshmen during fall and spring semesters to measure personal growth and change from high school to college
- Recent alumni surveys – given to recent alumni to measure and record post-graduate experiences; given once every four years
- First destination surveys – given to seniors who are graduating to measure post-graduation plans; given every year

Systematized assessment – Good assessment means that certain assessment activities take place every semester or annually. Greenville University uses systematized assessment with FCARs, End-of-Semester reports, End-of-Year reports, etc. This type of assessment is preferred over assessment that is conducted once every 5 to 10 or more years, because documentation and details are less likely to be forgotten or excluded. This allows for more time to be allocated to improving student learning and curriculum immediately.

T

Threshold – The minimum point or percentage that a student must meet in order to be competent in that course objective.

Tracks - Within a program. Our best understanding of HLC requirements in this area suggests that we should cease referring to specialized pathways within a program. The new guidelines seem to treat a track/emphasis as a separate program, thus requiring a separate assessment plan and a designated full-time faculty member.

U

Using assessment for improvement – This is the same as ‘Closing the Loop’, in which, professors use assessment data gathered from various means (e.g. course evaluations, grades, feedback, etc.) to make improvements on the course or program.

V

Validity – The extent to which an assessment measurement measures what it claims to measure or assess. A valid assessment measurement should consistently produce results that lead to valid inferences.

VALUE rubrics – Rubrics that were created by the AAC&U for the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education as part of the LAP initiative. These rubrics can be used to help institutions demonstrate and assess student accomplishment.

References

- Assessment and Institutional Review. (2019). Duties and Functions of Institutional Research. *Airweb*. Retrieved from <https://www.airweb.org/ir-data-professional-overview/duties-and-functions-of-institutional-research>.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (N/A). VALUE: What is VALUE?. AAC&U. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value>.
- Clark University. (NA). Glossary of Assessment Terms. *Clark University*. http://www.clark.edu/tlc/outcome_assessment/documents/GlossaryofAssessmentTerms.pdf.
- Freedman, M. & Houtz, J. (2004). A glossary of terms used in educational assessment. *Parenting for High Potential*. Retrieved from <https://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10461>.
- Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication. (N/A). Assessment Terms and Definitions. *California State University, Northridge*. Retrieved from <https://www.csun.edu/mike-curb-arts-media-communication/assessment-terms-and-definitions>.
- NILOA. (2019). Transparency framework. *National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment*. Retrieved from <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/TransparencyFramework.htm>.
- NSSE. (2019). About NSSE. *National Survey of Student Engagement*. Retrieved from <http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/about.cfm>.
- Stephen F. Austin State University. (N/A). Glossary of assessment terms. Retrieved from <http://www.sfasu.edu/iao/pdf/GlossaryofAssessmentTerms.pdf>.
- Suski, L. (2009). *Assessing Student Learning* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.