

Guidelines for the Assessment of Student Learning Illinois Wesleyan University

To assist departments, schools, interdisciplinary programs, and university-wide programs (hereafter, “academic units”) in realizing more effective assessments of their students’ learning, the Assessment Committee provides the following guidelines. Our intention is to assist academic units with the sometimes challenging but always informative—and often rewarding—endeavor of discovering to what extent student learning is consistent with an academic unit’s learning goals.

This guide covers the University’s academic assessment program, including:

- the *philosophy* of assessment;
- the *process* of assessment;
- the designation of *Assessment Liaisons*;
- the components of the *Strategic Assessment Plan*;
- the components of the *Yearly Update*; and
- the components of the *Assessment Report*.

Where appropriate, these discussions also include explicit identification of the criteria the Committee uses to offer feedback on assessment planning and reporting.

Calendar of Annual Assessment Activities

Start of the academic year

At the beginning of each academic year, it is the responsibility of each academic unit to ensure that the most up-to-date version of the Strategic Assessment Plan is on file with the Institutional Effectiveness Specialist. If a more up-to-date version of the Strategic Assessment Plan needs to be completed, please submit it electronically to assessment@iwu.edu.

Fall semester

Begin the annual assessment work. For example, academic units may lay the groundwork for assessment by developing surveys, collecting papers, conducting pre-tests, etc.

The Assessment Committee will review Yearly Updates submitted

A calendar of academic units' annual assessment activities can be found on the Student Learning Assessment web page, available at <http://www.iwu.edu/institres/student-learning.html>.

ASSESSMENT LIAISONS

The Assessment Liaison serves as the point person for an academic unit's assessment activities. Each academic unit should select a faculty member to serve as an Assessment Liaison and make that person known (via e-mail message to assessment@iwu.edu) to the Chair of the Assessment Committee by the first Monday of April of each academic year. While an academic unit's chair or director could serve as the Assessment Liaison, each academic unit should create its own system for assigning this task. Please note that while the Assessment Liaison plays an important role in an academic unit's annual assessment activities by helping to ensure proper organization, operation, and reporting, assessment is the responsibility of all members of an academic unit.

THE STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT PLAN (approximately 3 to 5 pages)

The Strategic Assessment Plan is due on the last Monday of January if submitting a new or a revised Strategic Assessment Plan. A copy of the most up-to-date version of the Strategic Assessment Plan must be on file with the Assessment Committee. A ree(n)6(tr o)-MClr oic 34(a)14t1esa9d2on fil 34(l 34(l 340.23 0005 c)4(me

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1. What are the student learning goals of your academic unit? How did your academic unit arrive at these goals? How are your academic unit's student learning goals shared with relevant constituencies?

Student learning goals are characteristics and competencies that students in your academic unit should acquire. If your academic unit offers a major, focus on the characteristics and competencies expected from the major. Academic units

provided that no personal student behaviors are addressed in the assessments, all personally identifiable information is removed, and the results are used for internal university and accreditation purposes. Anonymous surveys, however, do require the use of a "project information page" that summarizes the purpose of the study for all potential subjects. Academic units must maintain student confidentiality in the storage of data, if any.

IRB review *is* required under the following conditions:

Reflection and flexibility are essential for the success of assessment work. Therefore, occasional modifications to the steps outlined in the Strategic Assessment Plan are appropriate when the circumstances or data clearly indicate the need for changes. If such modifications are made, they must be described and explained in Yearly Updates and Assessment Reports, or in the revised StrAP.

QUESTION

QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

1. Recounting the Assessment Cycle

Assessment Reports address assessment activities that were outlined in the Strategic Assessment Plan

4. Describe the process by which you evaluated your data.

Academic units are urged to reflect on the findings from the measures, and on the methods and standards used to reach conclusions. Once the data were gathered, how did your academic unit go about sharing and analyzing the data? What methods, subjective or objective, did your academic unit use to assess your findings? A common subjective method is conversation among an academic unit's faculty. You might report details about that conversation, such as the following: Was it a retreat or a meeting set aside for this purpose? Who was involved? Were all members of your academic unit involved, and was anybody in addition to members of your academic unit involved? When did it take place? Commonly, objective measures involve statistical analyses of tests administered – some description of the method should be provided. Who performed this analysis? Using what tools?

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QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- o Is the evaluation process clearly defined?

any changes

Appendix A GLOSSARY

Academic unit: any department, school, interdisciplinary program, and university-wide program.

Anonymous study: a study in which information provided by a subject cannot be linked to any type of identifier. Often requires only the use of a “project information page” that summarizes the purpose of the study for all potential subjects. Does not require review by the Institutional Review Board.

Assessment Liaison: the member of an academic unit (often the chair or director) who ensures that the academic unit completes its annual assessment activities.

Assessment Report: due the final Monday in September, it records an academic unit’s assessment activities in the previous assessment cycle: what an academic unit has assessed, and why, and what an academic unit is doing in response to its findings: what strengths were revealed or changes were suggested, and then made, based on assessment data?

Confidential study: a study in which a subject’s name is linked to a code, number, or other type of identifier. Often requires informed consent, and therefore requires review by the Institutional Review Board.

Direct Measure: a method of assessment that requires students to demonstrate knowledge and competencies as they respond to the instrument itself. (For examples, please consult Appendix B.)

Feedback mechanism: the systematic way an academic unit discusses, shares, and sometimes acts upon the results of the assessment measures of student learning.

Indirect Measure: a method of assessment that requires students to reflect on their learning rather than demonstrate it. (For examples, please consult Appendix B.)

Measure: a method of assessment.

Non-Measure: a method of assessment that seems to offer information about student academic achievement but that does not in fact provide evidence of learning. (For examples, please consult Appendix B.)

Qualitative measures: methods of assessment that describe meaning rather than draw statistical inferences.

Quantitative measures: methods of assessment that employ statistical, mathematical, and/or computational techniques to focus on numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience.

Rubric: a guide listing specific evaluative criteria.

Strategic Assessment Plan: a description of an academic unit’s overarching assessment agenda which helps the

- Selecting superficial measures of curricular goal attainment.
- Selecting measures that fail to capture the goal attainment they intend to measure, i.e., the measures fail to be “valid” [or, in the terminology of these “Guidelines,” “well-targeted”], they are off target.
- Selecting measures that produce inconsistent outcomes over time, i.e., the measures fail to be “reliable” [or, in the terminology of these Guidelines, “dependable”].
- Having non-measures parading as measures.

Remember that the Assessment Committee exists to assist academic units with assessment activities.