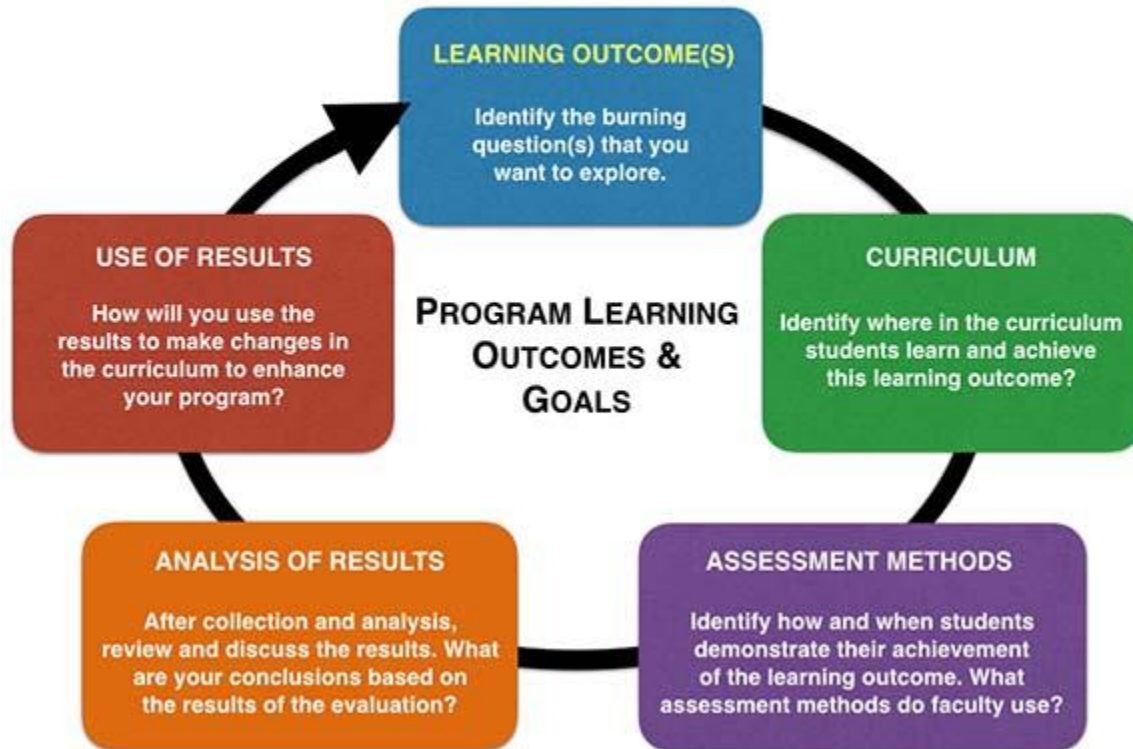


Using Assessment Results for Program Improvement

The Assessment Cycle



Effective Use of Assessment Results

Using assessment results to inform program changes or improvements is perhaps the most challenging final step in the assessment cycle – commonly referred to as ‘closing the loop’. Linda Suskie (2009) provides invaluable reminders to ensure that assessment results are used effectively and appropriately:

- Assessment reports that end up briefly perused and then filed without any resulting action are a waste of time.
- Assessment results should never dictate the decisions; we should always use our professional judgment to interpret the results to help make appropriate decisions.
- Actively discourage inappropriate interpretations or use of assessment results. How results have been used in the past has been shown to have a significant effect on people’s willingness to participate in gathering and using assessment information.
- Prevent problems with closing the loop by carefully planning your assessment.

- While positive assessment results should be celebrated, even more recognition and reward should go to exemplary assessment efforts.
- Promote the use of multiple sources of information when making any major decision.
- Communicate assessment information widely and transparently.

Suskie, L.A. (2009). Assessing student learning: A common sense guide. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

The effective use of assessment results starts with thoughtful planning. With the collaborative effort of faculty, assessment plans can be designed to produce actionable results. Sometimes, the use of assessment results can be a challenge, especially when they are perceived as not being relevant, valid or credible. They may be incomplete or not actionable. There may have been limited resources or overly heavy faculty workloads that made the task untenable.

So, a great way to start the planning process is:

- Begin with the mindset that the assessment effort is for discovery, hypothesis testing, and ultimately for enhancing student learning and overall program improvement.
- Begin with a clear, compelling question(s) about student learning ~ ones that faculty really care about.
- Discuss and choose the most effective “method” that will answer this question
- Focus on the fact that the method to collect and analyze the data will affect how the results will ultimately be used.
- Do a mock-up of the results for discussion. Discuss these hypothetical results with faculty to improve the methods to be used. Interpret what conclusions might be drawn and anticipate what the program would do if the results fall short of expectations.

It is critical that the entire faculty be involved in the discussion of assessment findings and the recommended actions for making program improvements based upon the findings. There are myriad examples of effective uses of assessment results as they relate to the program’s curriculum, budget and resources, academic processes, and promotion and marketing of the program.

Examples of Effective Use of Assessment Results

Curriculum examples might include:

- Modifying the frequency and schedule of course offerings
- Adding or removing course from the curriculum
- Pedagogical models or approaches to be shared among faculty and students
- Revision of course content or assignments

Budget and resource examples might include:

- Increasing classroom space
- Adding lab resources
- Hiring or re-assigning faculty or staff

Academic process examples might include:

- Revising course prerequisites
- Revising criteria for admission to the program
- Revising advising processes or protocols

Promotion and marketing examples might include:

- Communicating and celebrating student performance and success
- Communicating student voices and perceptions to stakeholders
- Industry feedback from external assessments
- Including student work on the program website, recruiting materials, fundraising materials or in the self-study