

What will happen to the assessment information we collect?

Assessment data will remain in your department. Although you will be asked to report general findings to your school and the Assessment Council, you will not be asked for individual-level data or similar types of information. In fact, confidentiality should be maintained just as you would for research data.

How does assessment affect academic program planning?

The value of assessment is in its potential to inform and improve academic programs (i.e., certificates, and undergraduate and graduate degrees). Faculty discussions of assessment processes and their results create a shared understanding of the effects of the curriculum on student learning. They also generate ideas for improvements that could be made and how to make them. In fact, the real value of assessment is in its ability to spark questions and conversation.

What about the assessment of general education?

Based on feedback following a North Central Association site visit in 2000, IPFW developed a number of pilot assessment processes for general education that provided initial assessment information. Currently, those processes and the information they produced are being reviewed by IPFW's General Education Subcommittee for further action.

What resources are available to help us get started?

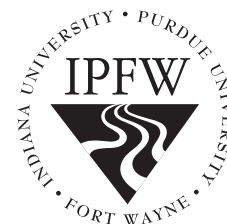
Contact the Director of Assessment in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for assistance in starting or improving your assessment plan. The director is available to respond to questions or work directly with you on academic program assessment. You might also apply for an assessment mini-grant or access the other resources available at the assessment web site through academic affairs.

Director of Assessment  
Office of the Vice Chancellor of  
Academic Affairs  
IPFW  
2101 E Coliseum Blvd  
Fort Wayne, IN 46805-1499  
260-481-5411 • frewe@ipfw.edu

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# Academic Program Assessment

## Questions & Answers



## Academic Program Assessment

*is a key requirement for our continued accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission and for the accreditation of many of our professional programs. However, its benefits go far beyond meeting accreditation standards. Assessment is really about academic program improvement. It helps us document the quality and success of our academic programs and identify opportunities for growth and development. This brochure is designed to respond to questions faculty most frequently ask about assessment and its role in academic programs.*

What is program assessment and why do we do it?

Assessment is a systematic approach to collecting, analyzing and reviewing information to improve learning. It is a process conducted and controlled by the faculty of academic units to determine if program objectives are being met. It's important because it tells us what and how much students are learning and where they're learning it. It gives us insight into how we might refine our programs to help them learn more. Assessment can be used by faculty and students to communicate to future employers and graduate schools what knowledge, skills and abilities our graduates possess. It may also be the basis for publications, as many disciplines actively publish assessment-related articles and books. We also engage in assessment because the Higher Learning Commission requires all academic institutions to provide evidence of student learning in order for them to be accredited.

What isn't it?

Assessment is not evaluation of individual faculty, staff or students. It tells us how well the entire academic program is meeting its purpose. Nor is it simply a record of course grades—assessment occurs at the outcome or program level and is more longitudinal in nature. It does not impose what or how faculty teach; rather, it's a way to provide evidence that our students are learning what we intend.

What will happen if we don't do assessment?

Without effective assessment processes, we can only make claims about what we teach as opposed to what students actually learn. Furthermore, without assessment evidence, we may jeopardize our accreditation and consequently, the availability of some forms of financial aid for IPFW students.

Students evaluate our teaching, so why is additional assessment necessary?

Classroom evaluation and program assessment target different levels or areas of improvement. Student evaluation provides feedback on their satisfaction with faculty teaching. Academic program assessment, on the other hand, does not evaluate teaching; it focuses on how well our students, in aggregate, are learning.

Is it true that we are required to do internal, external, interim and exit assessment?

No! Senate Document 98-22, the Plan for the Assessment of Student Academic Achievement, was amended in 2003 to reflect a more flexible approach to assessment. Departments have more latitude in designing assessment processes so long as they provide meaningful information about the quality of the academic programs.

Who should be involved in our program's assessment?

In addition to faculty, other constituents can provide insight into the curriculum and offer feedback on student learning. For example, alumni, current students and employers might be involved in an advisory group to discuss expectations for graduates and results of assessment, giving you a broader, richer perspective of the programs, their purpose and their effects. Such discussions may also be a valuable component of the program review process. Students who can readily articulate the knowledge and skills they gained at IPFW will have an advantage over job and graduate school applicants who cannot.

How can we do assessment when we have so many obligations placing demands on us?

It's important to develop assessment processes that are realistic and manageable. The best plans balance the demands they place on time and other resources with the need for on-going, reliable information. Elaborate, complex plans are taxing for departments and are often abandoned due to time constraints. The Assessment Director may be able to help you identify ways to stagger assessment efforts, embed them in existing student assignments, use data for multiple purposes or streamline processes that don't compromise quality, but make assessment realistic to implement.

What "counts" as assessment? Does it have to be a standardized test?

Departments will be most comfortable when they apply research techniques from their own discipline for assessment. Determining whether objectives are being met can be determined through qualitative and quantitative approaches. In fact, any approach that provides reliable information for illuminating questions you really care about can be used. Examples of sources of assessment information include case studies, projects, performances, portfolios, internships, interviews, presentations, library exercises, comprehensive oral exams, concept maps, recitals and research papers.

What are academic program objectives and how do they fit into assessment?

Program objectives are specific, observable, measurable statements of what you expect students to know and do as a consequence of completing your program of study. It is important that objectives are appropriate and relevant because they serve as the standard or benchmark for assessing student learning. Actual student achievement, represented in some form of their work, will be compared to program objectives and gaps between them will be identified. These gaps are what faculty act on to improve the curriculum and processes of matriculation. Identifying areas for improvement is the purpose of assessment.

What does a capstone class/experience have to do with assessment?

As the culminating learning experience, capstones offer a good opportunity to collect assessment information. Typically, students are called upon to demonstrate what they've learned throughout their education through, for example, papers, projects and presentations. These provide good evidence of learning for assessment purposes.

We want to make changes to our department's assessment plan. What do we need to do to update it?

Assessment plans are developed and refined over time as we learn more about assessment and our academic programs. Plan changes, including changes to the learning objectives, should be submitted to your school for review and upon approval, sent to the Assessment Council. Following consideration and approval by the Council, the new plan is posted to the assessment web site for 90 days for review and feedback from the IPFW community. Plans are then forwarded to the senate via the Education Policy Committee.