

The Insight

Program level assessment of student learning is a critical component of a quality program.

Implications

Programs have the dedication and support for developing a quality assessment process from the Academic Program Review Council, the Academic Affairs Assessment Committee, and the Provost's office. We are all here to help programs develop the highest quality learning experience for FSU students.

"Faculty assess all the time in their classes and in their programs. You are constantly considering what worked well and what didn't, and using those observations and impressions to make changes in your curriculum. What formal assessment does is make those informal activities more systematic and more public."

- Barbara Walvoord

PROGRAM REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

I think that faculty are sometimes hesitant when words like 'assessment' and 'learning outcomes' are used. I would like to try and alleviate some of those concerns. Assessment is something that faculty are already doing. Assessment simply means that a review of what has occurred during the learning experience is conducted to ensure that what faculty intend for their students to know and be able to do is (in fact) what students are learning. Formalized assessment is simply a way to standardize and codify those faculty evaluations into a measurable system that allows for program improvements to be made with the help of specific measures. Reliable assessment of student learning is a key element of a quality program.

An analogy for formal monitoring of program-level student learning outcomes would be someone trying to lose a few extra pounds. The person wishing to lose weight determines that the goal is to lose weight (the outcome – which may be that students be able to effectively present themselves through the written word) and that one way to do that is to begin walking for 30 minutes each day (the intervention – which may be the assignment of one (or more) papers for a student throughout the course of their time in the program). An informal way to measure progress with weight loss may be to make a judgement call as to how the person feels at the end of six months of walking. This is how much of assessment is approached (how does the quality of the papers received 'feel?') Formalized assessment of weight loss would be to take a specific measure at the start of the walking regimen (current weight) and then again at the end of six months of walking. Formalized assessment of student learning outcomes is exactly the same. A baseline of student performance is taken (writing examples from early in their coursework, for example) and then again at the end to measure progress. If students are performing to an acceptable standard at the end of their time in the program, then the experiences a student has had (related to proficient communication through writing) are working (that is, they are accomplishing the goal of producing quality writers.) However, if student progress is not as advanced as faculty decide is necessary for success, then the results show that changes to students' experiences through the program must be made to improve progress related to writing.

Working in close collaboration with the Academic Senate, the Academic Affairs Assessment Committee, and the Provost's office, the Academic Program Review Council has made it a strong focus to help programs develop a learning outcome approach that will help programs make decisions that improve program quality for the best student experience.