

Student Affairs Assessment Quickie: 9 Things to Ponder about Assessment

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning.

Good assessment is based on a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and how they might best achieve these. It sets out to measure what matters most.

Assessment should be based on an understanding of how students learn.

Assessment is most effective when it reflects the fact that learning is a complex process that is multi-dimensional, integrated and revealed in student performance over time.

Assessment should be an integral component of our work and not something to add afterwards.

The teaching and learning elements of each program should be designed in full knowledge of the sorts of assessment students will undertake, and vice versa, so that students can demonstrate what they have learned and see the results of their efforts.

Good assessment requires clarity of purpose, goals, standards and criteria.

Assessment works best when it is based on clear statements of purpose and goals for the course, the standards which students are expected to achieve, and the criteria against which we measure success. Assessment criteria in particular need to be understandable and explicit so students know what is expected of them from each assessment they encounter.

Good assessment requires a variety of measures.

It is generally the case that a single assessment instrument will not tell us all we need to know about student achievement and how it can be improved. We therefore need to be familiar with a variety of assessment tools so we can match them closely to the type of information we seek.

Assessment methods used should be valid, reliable and consistent.

Assessment instruments and processes should be chosen which directly measure what they are intended to measure.

Assessment requires attention to outcomes and processes.

Information about the outcomes students have achieved is very important to know where each student ends up, but so too is knowing about their experiences along the way and, in particular, the kind of effort that led to these outcomes.

Assessment works best when it is ongoing rather than episodic.

Student learning is best fostered when assessment involves a linked series of activities undertaken over time, so that progress is monitored towards the intended goals.

Assessment for improved performance involves feedback and reflection.

All assessment methods should allow students to receive feedback on their learning and performance so assessment serves as a developmental activity aimed at improving student learning. Assessment should also provide students and staff with opportunities to reflect on both their practice and their learning overall.