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# **Assessment of Graduate Programs: Clear, Simple, and USEFUL**

Barbara E. Walvoord, Ph.D.  
Professor Emerita  
University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame IN 46556  
[Walvoord@nd.edu](mailto:Walvoord@nd.edu)  
Mobile: 574-361-3857

## SACS Standards

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assess the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:

- 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- 3.3.1.2 administrative support services
- 3.3.1.3 educational support services
- 3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate

3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general educational competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them.

Principles of Accreditation, 2008. [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)

2.21: The Required QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan)

- Derived from the ongoing institutional planning process
- Has improvement and student learning as its starting and ending points
- Focused; does not try to solve all the institution's problems
- One-hundred-page document containing:
  - Five-year plan linking focus and outcomes of the QEP to resources
  - Topic linked to improvement of student learning
  - Clear identification of student learning related to the focus of the QEP
  - Documentation of broad based involvement
  - Well crafted goals that can be measured
  - Documentation of research on best practices
  - Implementation plan inclusive of timelines, budgets, assessment schedule, and personnel
  - Evaluation plan

Adapted from "The Anatomy of the QEP" powerpoint by Joseph H. Silver, Sr. Vice President, SACS COC (Commission on Colleges)

### ***The Required Five-Year Report***

Major component is "Impact Report of the QEP on Student Learning"

- Succinct list of initial goals and intended outcomes of QEP
- Discussion of changes made to the original QEP and reasons for those changes
- Description of the QEP's direct impact on student learning including the achievement of goals and outcomes outlined above
- Unanticipated outcomes of the QEP if any

## Definition of Assessment

Assessment of student learning is the systematic gathering of information about student learning and the factors that affect learning, undertaken with the resources, time, and expertise available, for the purpose of improving the learning.

**The purpose of assessment is informed decision-making, including the use of information about student learning.**

**If you are gathering information you are not using, then either stop gathering it or start using it.**

## The Three Basic Steps of Assessment

1. **GOALS:** Articulate learning goals  
“When students complete this [course, major, gen-ed program] we want them to be able to....”
2. **INFORMATION:** Gather information about how well students are achieving the goals and why
3. **ACTION:** Use the information for improvement

## The Basic, No-Frills Departmental Assessment Plan

1. Learning goals (at the end of the program, students will be able to...)
2. Two measures:
  - a. One direct measure (direct means student performance is directly evaluated, as in qualifying exams, theses, practicums, laboratory work, etc.)
    - i. Review of end-point student work
    - ii. If students take a licensure or certification exam, this will be added as a second direct measure
  - b. One indirect measure (indirect means an intervening step, such as asking students what they thought they learned, or tracking their career placement)
    - i. My preference: exiting student surveys and/or focus groups asking three questions:
      1. How well did you achieve each of the following departmental learning goals [use scale such as “extremely well, very well, adequately well, not very well, not at all”]  
[list each department goal, with scoring scale for each]
      2. What aspects of your education in this department helped you with your learning, and why were they helpful?
      3. What might the department do differently that would help you learn more effectively, and why would these actions help?
    - ii. Second choice: Alumni surveys
    - iii. In some fields, job placement rates will be important
3. Annual meeting to discuss data and identify action items.
  - a. Set aside at least 2 hours to discuss ONE of your degree programs.
  - b. Put the annual meeting in place NOW, without waiting for the perfect data.
  - c. At the meeting, consider whatever data you have about learning, no matter how incomplete or inadequate.
  - d. Outcomes of the meeting:
    - i. ONE action item to improve student learning, with a timeline and assignment of responsibility
    - ii. ONE action item to improve the quality of data, if needed, with a timeline and assignment of responsibility
  - e. Keep minutes of the meeting
    - i. To serve as your own record and reminder
    - ii. To document for accreditors that assessment is taking place

# Sample Assessment Report for Ph. D. Program

## 1. Goals for Student Learning

When students complete the Ph.D. they should be able to:

1. Conduct original, publishable research in the field.
2. Demonstrate a broad knowledge of theory and research across several sub-disciplines in the field.
3. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of one area of expertise.
4. Follow ethical guidelines for work in the field.
5. Write and speak effectively to professional and lay audiences about issues in the field.
6. For those entering teaching: grade and comment effectively on undergraduate student work, lead discussion and recitation effectively for undergraduates, demonstrate familiarity with the literature on learning and pedagogy, write a thoughtful teaching philosophy, and plan an effective undergraduate course in the field.

## 2. Gathering and Using Information about Student Achievement of the Goals

Measures	Goals Addressed	Use of the Information
Each January the Graduate Committee reviews all theses and dissertations produced during the previous year for originality and cogency of the theoretical and empirical work, and clarity of the presentation. The committee produces a report of overall strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations for the program.	1, 2, 3, 4	The report is presented annually to the graduate faculty for discussion and action as appropriate. Summaries are presented for review and recommendations every 7-8 years as part of academic review.
The department tracks graduates' employment and placement for a period of 5 years.	1, 2, 3, 4	As above
The department tracks students' presentations and publications.	1,2,3,4	As above
The university's Graduate School conducts student exit interviews that ask students about their learning and the factors that influenced their learning. These are reported annually to the Director of Graduate Studies.	all	As above
For those entering teaching: Each faculty member with an assigned TA writes an	5	As above. Reports by faculty with TA's and by the

annual report that evaluated the quality of work the TA has done.		teaching course instructor are presented annually to the Graduate Director, who summarizes them in a report to the Grad Committee.
The instructor of the one-credit graduate teaching course analyzes strengths and weaknesses of students' written teaching philosophy statements and their course plans.		

### 3. Examples of Changes Based on Assessment Information

- In 2001, an analysis of student publications and presentations, compared to those of peer departments, showed the number of publications was not as high as the department wished. We instituted a one-credit required seminar for all graduate students focusing on the production and placement of articles and presentations. Since then, the number of articles and presentations has risen 32%.
- Analysis of theses over several years raised faculty concerns about the quality of the writing. In response, the department hired a writing coach to work individually with each candidate on his/her writing.

### 4. Recommendations for Changes in the Assessment Process

- Faculty have requested more guidance in writing their reviews of TA work, and the Graduate Director has asked for more unanimity in those reports, to facilitate the work of analyzing them. A sub-committee has been formed to draft guidelines for students' work in grading papers and in leading discussion/recitation sections.

## Resources

### The Short List

- Walvoord, B. E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. Jossey-Bass, 2004. In 79 pages plus appendices, I try to give institutions, departments, and gen ed programs all they will need.
- Palomba, C. A., and Banta, T.W., eds. *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines: Pioneering Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2001. At 350 pages, it gives more extensive details on many of the subjects covered in Walvoord.
- Banta, T.W., Jones, E.A., and Black, K.E. *Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Suskie, L. *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. Anker, 2004. A 300-page guide with many good ideas and illustrations.
- Banta, T. W., Lund, J. P., Black, K. E., and Oblander, F. W. *Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996. Contains 82 case studies of best practice, each in 2-3 pages. Though now nine years old, still a wealth of practical ideas. 350 pages.
- Walvoord, B. E., and Anderson, V. J. *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009. Shows how the classroom grading process can be enhanced and how it can be used for assessment. Helps classroom teachers make the grading process fair, time-efficient, and conducive to learning. Contains a case study of how a community college used the grading process for general-education assessment.
- Web pages and publications of your regional and professional accreditors

### General Education Assessment

- Banta, T.W. (ed.). *Assessing Student Achievement in General Education: Assessment Update Collection*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. Banta's opening essay is very helpful as an overview of gen-ed assessment and a sensible evaluation of possible approaches. The rest of the volume contains essays from the newsletter *Assessment Update*.
- Bresciani, M.J. (ed). *Assessing Student Learning in General Education*. Boston, MA: Anker, 2007. Very useful case studies.
- Leskes, A., and Wright, B. *The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes: A Practical Guide*. Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2005. [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).

### Additional Resources

- Astin, A. W. *Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. American Council on Education Series on Higher

Education. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1993. A thoughtful treatment of the values and theoretical frameworks behind various assessment practices, as well as very practical advice about gathering and interpreting data, from one of the most respected higher education researchers.

- Banta, T. W. & Associates. *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002. Essays by leaders in the field, addressing practical issues, but focusing on developing a “scholarship of assessment.” Bibliography provides recent references to more specialized works on designing and selecting assessment instruments and other topics. 300 pages.
- Huba, M. E., and Freed, J. E. *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning*. Needham Heights, MA.: Allyn & Bacon, 2000.
- Lucas, A.F., and Associates. *Leading Academic Change: Essential Roles for Department Chairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Collection of essays on leading change in departments. Essays by Gardiner and Angelo are especially valuable for guiding assessment.
- Messick, S. J., ed. *Assessment in Higher Education: Issues of Access, Quality, Student Development, and Public Policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999. Places assessment in broader social and political contexts.
- Nichols, J. L. *Assessment Case Studies: Common Issues in Implementation with Various Campus Approaches to Resolution*. New York: Agathon Press, 1995. Nichols, J.O. *The Departmental Guide and Record Book for Student Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Agathon Press, 1995. Nichols, J.O. *A Practitioner’s Handbook for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Outcomes Assessment Implementation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Agathon Press, 1995. These are practical guides to an extensive assessment process, with illustrative case studies.
- Peterson, M. S. Augustine, C. H., Einarson, M.K., and Vaughan, D. S. *Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Associate of Arts Institutions*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1999. Similar volumes, also 1999, on Baccalaureate, Comprehensive, and Doctoral/Research universities.
- Upcraft, M. L. and Schuh, J. H. *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.
- Walvoord, B. E. “Assessment in Accelerated Learning Programs.” In R. J. Wlodkowski and C. E. Kasworm (eds.), *Accelerated Learning for Adults: The Promise and Practice of Intensive Educational Formats*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 97. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. An 11-page summary of an early version of Walvoord’s *Assessment Clear and Simple*, applicable not only to accelerated learning but also to traditional higher education.
- <http://ericae.net>: provides links to what the sponsors consider some of the best full-text books, reports, journal articles, newsletter articles, and papers on the Internet that address educational measurement, evaluation and learning theory
- <http://ts.mivu.org>: The on-line journal, *The Technology Source*, sponsored by Michigan Virtual University, contains an online index: look under “assessment—past articles.”

Practical ideas for classroom and institutional assessment of online courses as well as other computer-based applications such as on-line testing.

- [www2.acs.ncsu.edu/upa/assmt/resource.htm](http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/upa/assmt/resource.htm). North Carolina State University maintains a website with links to numerous resources on assessment.
- Subscribe to *Assessment Update* for the most recent examples and developments in assessment. Published monthly, it contains brief case studies of successful practice, updates on new developments, and reflections on issues of theory and practice. Order from the web page ([www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)) or by phone, 888-481-2665. Back issues are available.
- Conferences:
  - National Assessment Institute, held in Indianapolis under the auspices of the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, organized by Trudy Banta, one of the leading experts in assessment ([www.planning.iupui.edu](http://www.planning.iupui.edu). Click on conferences).
  - North Carolina State University annual assessment conference.  
<http://www.ncsu.edu/assessment/symposium/>
  - Annual conferences of your regional or disciplinary accreditor