



A Guide to Periodically Assessing Your Program-Level Assessment Process

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As part of Yeshiva University's overarching assessment plan, all programs are asked to engage in systematic, continuous, and well-documented assessment processes. In order to ensure that program-level assessment processes are generating meaningful information that is being used to improve student learning outcomes, it is important for programs to periodically review their program-level assessment process. Below is a list of guiding questions to consider when assessing the effectiveness of your program-level assessment process.

- 1. What is the purpose of our assessment process?** Are we engaging in assessment just to appease administrators and accreditation bodies, or are we engaging in assessment for the purpose of refining our program to ensure achievement of student learning outcomes? If the former is true, the assessment process being implemented is most likely not very meaningful. To ensure that a meaningful assessment process is being implemented it is essential for your program to be proactively engaging in a self-directed, continual assessment process that involves not just generating assessment data, but also using it to make meaningful improvements and refinements within your program for the purpose of enhancing student learning.
- 2. Is our assessment process collaborative?** In order for a program-level assessment process to be effective, it should involve collaboration from all program faculty. If only one faculty member is involved in the assessment process, it will not be a reflection of the larger program. Program faculty should collaborate in contributing to all aspects of the assessment process including, the development of program-level student learning goals and objectives, collecting direct assessment evidence, making sense of the assessment data and deciding how to use it in meaningful ways, and periodically reflecting on the assessment process.
- 3. Are the program level goals student-centered, meaningful, and aligned with the institutions mission and goals?** It is important that program-level goals focus on student learning within the program vs. what the program or faculty aim to accomplish. For example, while a program may have goals to expand its course offerings, add a minor, increase the number of student majors, etc., these goals, while important, are not focused on student learning. To ensure that your program-level goals are student-centered they should all begin with the phrase "students will be able to..." For example, "students will be able to think critically" or "students will be able to organize their ideas". In addition, in order to be meaningful, it is important that the goals are reflective of the actual learning experiences

offered to students in the program, and that the student-learning program goals are aligned with the overarching mission and learning goals of the institution.

4. Are the student-learning objectives, clear, specific, student-centered, and measurable?

The primary difference between a student learning goal and a student learning objective is that an objective is directly measurable and a goal is not. Student learning goals are written at the conceptual level. Student learning objectives are the measurable indicators of the larger overarching goal. In general, there should be at least two measurable indicators of each goal. To determine if an objective is directly measurable, ask yourself whether it focuses on one-specific directly observable behavior that serves as an indicator of the larger overarching goal. As with student learning goals, student learning objectives should begin with the phrase “students will be able to...”

5. Have we created a meaningful cycle for periodically assessing all of our program-level objectives?

Typically, it is not possible to meaningfully assess every program objective each semester. As a result, assessing objectives on a cyclical basis can be an effective way to ensure that all of your objectives are periodically assessed. It is important to identify whether there are any program objectives that are never, or are rarely assessed. In those cases ask whether those objectives are in fact central to the program. If the answer is yes then it is important to build those objectives into the assessment process. If the answer is no then those objectives should be eliminated. In general, it is better to air on the side of fewer objectives than too many objectives so that each objective can be periodically assessed in a meaningful way.

6. Do we offer courses and learning experiences aimed at fostering students’ achievement of student learning objectives?

Developing a program-level curriculum map, which maps program objectives onto key courses and learning experiences, is a great way to determine if there is adequate emphasis on program level objectives in the current courses or other learning experiences. If there are objectives that are not being emphasized in any program courses or learning experiences then ask whether those objectives are central to the program. If they are important objectives then current courses should be modified or new courses should be added to emphasize those objectives. If those objectives are not important then they should be eliminated.

7. Are we using direct assessment methods that are aligned with respective program-level objectives?

It is important that the assessment method being used is a direct method (as opposed to an indirect method) of obtaining information about the extent of students’ attainment of a given program-level objective. Direct assessments include tests, papers, projects, and presentations. Indirect methods focus on students’ and/or faculty's' perceptions

of students' learning experiences and outcomes. Examples of indirect assessment methods might include surveys, course evaluations, or interviews. While indirect assessments can provide useful information as well, they should not be implemented in place of direct assessment methods. Rather, indirect assessment methods should serve as a compliment to direct assessment methods. In addition, it is essential that the direct assessment method is aligned with the given objective. For example, if the objective is for students to be able to create informed hypotheses, then the assessment needs to align with this objective. A multiple choice test would not be a valid measure of this objective because that kind of assessment is not providing students with the opportunity to create. On the other hand, if the objective is for students to be able to recall the meanings of key concepts, a multiple choice test might be sufficient.

- 8. Do we share assessment results with other program faculty?** In order for assessment results to be useful, they should be shared with appropriate program faculty. For example, if an assessment reveals that a majority of program students are having difficulty with organizing their ideas in writing; other program faculty should be made aware of this finding so that they too can emphasize this objective in their courses too.
- 9. What are we doing with the data that we generate?** Collecting assessment information is only useful if the information is used to support students' learning within the program. Using assessment data is the final phase in the assessment cycle, and is called "closing the loop!". Ask whether the assessment data is being used to in some way to enhance students' attainment of program objectives. Some examples ways assessment data can be used include:
 - Revising program-level goals and outcomes
 - Changing curricula by adding or removing courses or program experiences, adding prerequisite courses, changing instructional methods or assignments within courses, etc.
 - Creating or modifying assessments
 - Creating or modifying rubrics
 - Using assessment results to support current program practices or to make other program policies or decisions
- 10. Are we effectively documenting our assessment process?** Transparency is key when it comes to meaningfully reflecting upon your program's assessment process. For this reason it is important to clearly document all key steps in your assessment process including, the program's mission statement, student learning goals and objectives, curriculum map, assessment methods and results, ways the assessment data is being used, and future assessment plans. Documentation provides a concrete means for reflecting upon and refining the assessment process in the future by enabling appropriate stakeholders (e.g., faculty,



administrators, and even students) to know the program's expectations with regards to student learning objectives, as well as areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement within the program.