

Glossary of Assessment Terms

Activities – Activities describe the actions taken in support of attaining a desired outcome.

Alignment – Alignment describes the relationship or linkage between a unit outcome and the Winthrop Plan, Division/College Strategic Plan, and ULCs.

Analysis/Interpretation – Analysis/interpretation is the systematic examination of data, allowing for a context in which data are discussed, decisions are made, and actions are taken.

Assessment – Assessment is the ongoing systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information to improve student learning, student support, and university services and operations.

Assessment Methods – Assessment methods are the strategies, techniques, tools, and instruments used for collecting information in order to determine the extent to which a desired outcome is attained.

Assessment Results – Assessment results are the findings that indicate the level of student learning, program performance, services, or processes attained.

Benchmark – A benchmark is a measurement of group performance compared to an established standard of performance, often external to the institution (e.g., comparable, exemplary, or aspirational unit). A unit may also use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance.

Best Practice – Best practices are methods and techniques that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means and which are used as benchmarks.

Bloom's Taxonomy – Bloom's taxonomy is a widely used system for determining the level of cognitive performance. The system was first proposed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 and has since been modified by others. The taxonomy consists of six cognitive levels. From lowest to highest level of cognition, they include Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating.

Continuous Improvement – Continuous improvement is the ongoing improvement of student learning, programs, services, or processes through incremental and data-informed actions.

Continuous Improvement Action Plan – The Continuous Improvement Action Plan describes specific data-informed actions to be undertaken in the subsequent assessment cycle to enhance student learning, program, services, or processes.

Curriculum Map – A curriculum map is a visual representation demonstrating the alignment between an academic program's curriculum and student learning outcomes.

Data – Data is a collection of results, facts, information, or statistics obtained from the measures used to assess student learning, programs, services, or processes.

Data Analysis – Data analysis is the process of organizing and examining data with the intent of discovering useful information, informing conclusions, and supporting decision-making.

Direct Method of Assessment – A direct method of assessment gathers evidence based on actual performance that demonstrates the level of outcome attainment. Direct academic assessments that examine student work or performance include embedded test questions, written papers, oral presentations, projects, performances, and portfolios. Audits, policies, document reviews, and completion records are examples of direct methods for administrative and student support units.

Documentation – Documentation is the materials/documents that provide evidence of the assessment methods used and the assessment results attained.

Effective – Effective is determining how well an approach, a process, or a method addresses its intended purpose.

Embedded Assessment – An embedded assessment is a means of gathering information about student learning that is a natural part of the teaching-learning process (e.g., assignment, student portfolios).

Indirect Method of Assessment – An indirect method of assessment gathers perceptions, rather than an actual demonstration of outcome attainment. It is a non-performance based indicator of success. Surveys, focus groups, interviews, graduate school enrollment, and job placement rates are examples of indirect methods of assessing the attainment of learning, satisfaction, or performance.

Institutional Effectiveness (IE) – Institutional effectiveness is the extent to which an institution achieves its mission and goals. IE is monitored through ongoing, integrated, institution-wide, research-based planning and evaluation processes, resulting in the continuing improvement of institutional quality.

Mission Statement – A mission statement is a concise statement that describes the unit’s purpose, explains its primary functions, and identifies who it serves (i.e., who the unit is, what it does, and who it serves).

Operational Outcome – An operational outcome is a specific statement, generally process-oriented, that addresses the unit’s performance, particularly in regard to operations, programs, and services.

Program Outcome – A program outcome addresses an important programmatic aspect, aside from student learning, particularly as it pertains to the quality and/or productivity of the program.

Qualitative Data – Qualitative data consists of descriptions, rather than numbers. This type of data lends itself to interpretive criteria, rather than to numerical manipulations. Examples include interviews, focus groups, and antidotal evidence.

Quantitative Data – Quantitative data is numerical in nature and can be analyzed using statistical techniques.

Reliability – Reliability is the extent to which an assessment method can be replicated and produce consistent results over time. Reliability is a precondition for validity.

Rubric – A rubric is a scoring tool that identifies a specific set of criteria to be rated and clearly defines the range of acceptable and unacceptable performance for each criterion.

Sampling – Sampling is the process of obtaining information from a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining characteristics of the whole population.

Student Learning Outcome – A student learning outcome states the specific, observable, and measurable knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes that students are expected to acquire and reliably demonstrate by the end of the learning experience.

Target – A target identifies the level of expected or desirable performance of an outcome.

Triangulation – Triangulation is the use of multiple assessment methods to determine if data support a consistent conclusion. For example, an academic program may use the pass rates on a nationally normed test along with the rubric-based assessment of a capstone project to assess a single outcome. An administrative unit may employ a survey, interviews, and observations to measure a unit outcome.

Validity – Validity is the extent to which an assessment method measures what it claims to assess.