

Institutional Effectiveness Glossary

Accreditation: The designation that an institution earns indicating that it functions appropriately with respect to its resources, programs, and services. The accrediting association, often comprised of peer, is recognized as the external monitor. Maintaining fully accredited status ensures that the university remains in compliance with federal expectations and continues to receive federal funding.

Assessment: AKA outcomes assessment. A systematic, ongoing process to identify, collect, analyze, and report on data that are used to determine program achievement. Results are used for understanding and improving student learning and administrative services and operations.

Assessment method/instrument: A tool used to evaluate assignments, activities, artifacts, or events that support outcomes or objectives. These can be measurement tools such as standardized tests; locally designed examinations; rubrics; exit interviews; or student, alumni, or staff surveys.

Assessment responsibility: Identifies who is responsible and accountable for each step in the assessment process, including who crafts outcomes and methods, collects and analyzes data, enters results in Xitracs, reports results, makes decisions based on data, and ensures decisions are implemented.

Benchmark: Describes the criterion for each outcome and identifies the target or minimum performance standard for each unit and/or student activity. It addresses why the expected target was selected.

Close the loop: The phrase indicates the ability to demonstrate – through a cycle of collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data – continuous improvement of curricular, programmatic, or operational efforts. It calls for using assessment results to improve programs.

Criterion: Identifies the target or minimum performance standard. For academic units, it states the percentage of students who will achieve the acceptable score. For administrative units, it establishes a target in terms of a number or percentage.

Culture of assessment: An institutional characteristic that shows evidence for valuing and engaging in assessment for ongoing improvement.

Direct data source: Student work or artifact used to determine whether they have demonstrated what instructors want them to learn. They are evaluated for student performance or proficiency. The direct methods most commonly used are:

- Embedded questions in examinations or quizzes
- Observations
- Portfolios
- Standardized or local examinations
- Student writing (e.g. essays or papers)

Effectiveness: The degree to which programs, events, or activities achieve intended results. Effectiveness indicates how well the curriculum, program, and even the university achieve their purpose.

Embedded assessment: Denotes a way to gather effectiveness information that is built into regular activities. When assessment is embedded, it is routine, unobtrusive, and an ongoing part of the teaching-learning or operational process.

Evaluation of results: The process of interpreting or making meaning about the data. The evaluation compares the results to the intentions and explains how they correlate.

Expected Outcomes: Brief, clear statements that describe desired outcomes in relation to objectives. Administrative and educational support units have outcomes that can be classified as process (what the unit intends to accomplish), target (what clients will be able to know, do, value, and believe after receiving the unit's services), or satisfaction oriented (client satisfaction level after receiving service).

Feedback: Providing assessment results and analysis to interested constituents in order to increase transparency. Information can be communicated to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and outside stakeholders.

Formative assessment: A study conducted during the operation of a program to provide information and increase understanding that is useful for improving program implementation. It involves gathering and interpreting evidence of performance at least once prior to the end of the program.

Indirect data source: Information that reflects student opinion or perception rather than knowledge, skills, or abilities. Indirect data sources cannot be evaluated for learning but are a source of information. Indirect data sources include:

- Exit interviews
- Focus groups
- Participation rates
- Surveys

Input: The variables that represent the time, energy, or other resources put into a process, program, activity, or event.

Institutional Effectiveness (IE): The term used to describe how well an institution is accomplishing its mission and how it engages in continuous improvement. It focuses largely on SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1 that states: The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and education support services, assesses whether it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

Institutional Effectiveness plan: A document that outlines and describes assessment activities, including identifying learning outcomes or program objectives, methods, and criteria. The plan

should include enough detail that anyone could read it and know exactly what to do to implement the plan. The plan should be reviewed frequently and revised any time new learning or operational goals are identified. Generally, programs update assessment plans early each academic year and submit results, analyses, and action plans the following fall.

Instrument: An assessment tool that is used for the purpose of collecting data, such as an exam or an interview protocol.

Method: Describes the procedures used to collect data for assessing a program, including identifying the assignment or activity and the process for measuring or scoring it.

Mission statement: Explains why a program or department exists and identifies its purpose. It articulates the organization's essential nature, its values, and its work and should be aligned with institutional mission. It is a clear, concise statement outlining the ultimate principles that guide the work of the program, whom it serves, in what ways, and with what results.

Objective: A broad, unmeasurable statement about what the program is trying to accomplish to meet its mission.

Objective measure: A score, grade, or evaluation that relies on a consistent, valid, and predetermined range. It does not depend on a subjective opinion.

Output: The impact, product, or result that occurs as a consequence of a program, event, or activity.

Peer assessment: The process of evaluating or assessing the work of one's peers.

Program Educational Objective (PEO): Describes the expected accomplishments or achievements of graduates within the first few years after their graduation. PEOs should support the mission of the program and institution.

Program Objective: Identifies results or outcomes that an administrative or student support services program is trying to achieve. Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART). Objectives describe what the unit is striving toward and are used in making policy and planning decisions.

Program Effectiveness Outcome: The specific, measurable knowledge, skill, or ability that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their studies. They are detailed aspects of the program that are accomplished by the successful culmination of the student learning outcomes.

Program review: An in-depth process of reviewing most aspects of a program, including operational, financial, programmatic, and academic inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Qualitative data: Nonnumeric information such as conversation, text, audio, and video.

Quantitative data: Numeric information including quantities, percentages, and statistics.

Results: Report the qualitative or quantitative findings of the data collection in text or table format. Results convey whether the outcomes or objectives were achieved at desired levels of performance.

Rubric: A systematic scoring guideline used to evaluate student performance (e.g., papers, speeches, exams, portfolios) using a detailed description of performance standards. When students are made aware of rubrics prior to instruction and assessment, they know the level of performance expected and are more motivated to reach those standards.

Sample: A defined subset of the population chosen based on 1) its ability to provide information; 2) its representativeness of the population under study; 3) factors related to the feasibility of data gathering, such as cost, time, participant accessibility, or other logistical concerns.

Self-assessment: The process of evaluating or reflecting on one's own learning and development.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC): The accrediting agency of higher education institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Standard of Performance: A specific expectation of student performance that shows progress toward a criterion.

Student Learning Outcome: specific student behaviors that evidence the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes or dispositions

Subjective measure: A score, grade, or evaluation that relies on opinion or judgment.

Summative assessment: A study aimed at understanding and improving learning, understanding, or performance at the completion of program activities. It involves gathering and interpreting evidence of performance at the end of a program and is used to help make decisions about program continuation, termination, expansion, or adoption.

Use of results: Identifies how the results are used and shared and lists any recommendations or action items.