

Harold Washington College

Draft Glossary of Assessment Terms

Affective Learning. Focuses on the social or personal development, change, or growth in student attitudes and/or values. The Affective Domain relies on self-report data, or surveys, such as student surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys, to yield important information. Surveys are **Indirect Measures** of learning since they do not provide **direct** evidence of student learning and achievement. Carefully constructed surveys can, however, provide evidence of students' *perceptions* of their learning.

Assessment. Refers to gathering and using evidence of student learning, development, and/or achievement. The fundamental purpose of assessment is to improve student learning and student performance. Assessment is a comprehensive process that is ongoing, systematic, structured, and sustainable. (See "HWC Definition and Philosophy of the Assessment of Student Learning," *HWC 2003-06 Draft Catalog*.)

After completion of a nationwide survey of educators, the Director of the Assessment Forum at the American Association for Higher Education offered the following definition of assessment:

"Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performance. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education" (*AAHE Bulletin*, November 1995, p. 7.).

Behavioral Learning (skill acquisition). Observable skills in the **Behavioral Domain** that demonstrate the attainment of a specific skill or set of skills. These skills typically include group interaction skills; presentation skills, oral communication skills, particularly in a group context; leadership skills, interpersonal skills; initiative; written communication; and problem solving skills. Demonstration of skill acquisition is considered a **Direct Measure** of learning.

Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy. See **Levels of Learning**.

Cognitive Learning. Higher-order thinking associated with knowledge acquisition. The cognitive **Domain** considers the degree to which students can demonstrate proficiency or mastery in using the "vocabulary, principles, and theories associated with the discipline" (T. Dary Erwin, 1991. *Assessing Student Learning and Development: A Guide to the Principles, Goals, and Methods of Determining College Outcomes*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).

Direct Measures. Instruments or methods that provide observable evidence of the student's acquisition of knowledge and skills. The attainment or acquisition of the knowledge or skill is directly demonstrated through a variety of means (e.g., performance on: written tests; oral examinations; lab experiments; capstone experiences; qualitative internal or external juried review of scientific projects; national licensure, certification, and professional examinations; externally reviewed exhibitions and performances in the arts; print-based or electronic portfolios; external assessment of performance during internships based on stated program objectives).

Domains of Learning. Educators generally recognize three domains of learning. They are **Cognitive Learning** (knowledge acquisition), **Behavioral Learning** (skill acquisition), and **Affective Learning** (attitudinal development).

Evaluation. The episodic review of such College processes as institutional effectiveness, academic program review, and faculty performance.

Indirect Measures. Instruments or methods that provide insight into students' *perceptions* of their learning or of the learning environment. The most common Indirect Measure is the survey, typically of students, employers, internship supervisors, and alumni. Other Indirect Measures include exit interviews of graduates; focus groups; graduate follow-up studies; retention rates; transfer rates; length of time to degree; graduation rates; and job placement data.

Instruments. Measures or methods of assessing learning. They include both **Quantitative** and **Qualitative** measures of learning. Typical instruments that measure the **Cognitive** and **Behavioral Domains** are:

- ◆ **Criterion-referenced Tests.** Instruments that measure student performance according to predetermined competencies, criteria, and/or performance standards.
- ◆ **Norm-referenced Tests.** Instruments that measure student knowledge or performance relative to the achievement of a peer group.
- ◆ **Standardized Tests.**
- ◆ **Locally Developed Measures.** Faculty developed instruments of student learning. Mesa Community College's faculty developed measure for its learning outcomes for the Arts and the Humanities objective is an example.
- ◆ **Portfolios.** Print-based or electronic collections of student artifacts that are collected in a purposeful manner over time to provide evidence of student development and achievement.
- ◆ **Scoring Rubrics.** Instruments that allow for differentiating scale or range of performance levels. Rubrics provide the criteria or performance standards by which a product or performance will be assessed.

Learning Objectives. "A statement derived from the goal that defines the circumstances by which it will be known if the desired change has occurred" (Gloria Rogers & Jean Sando. 1996. *Stepping Ahead: An Assessment Plan Development Guide*. Terre Haute, IN: Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology). HWC has seven Learning Objectives for the College's goal for general education (HWC Draft 2003-06 Catalog, p. 109).

Learning Outcomes A specific statement that identifies the standards for achievement or the criteria for performance that will meet the stated **Learning Objective**. Peter Ewell defines two types of Learning Outcomes, **Knowledge Outcomes** and **Skills Outcomes**. “Knowledge outcomes generally refer to particular areas of disciplinary or professional content that students can recall, relate, and appropriately deploy. Skills outcomes generally refer to the learned capacity to do something—for example, think crucially, communicate effectively, productively collaborate or perform particular technical procedures—either as an end in itself or as a prerequisite for further development” (Peter Ewell 2001. *Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure*. Washington, DC: Council for Higher Education Accreditation). A **Direct Measure** is typically used when the desired learning outcomes are observable; **Indirect Measures**, such as surveys, are used when the learning outcomes may not be directly assessable (e.g., valuing team work).

Levels of Learning Bloom developed a “Cognitive Taxonomy,” a hierarchically arranged classification scheme that defines student behavior (learning outcomes) at six levels of learning. The rank order of the Levels of Learning is from lowest (knowledge) to highest or most complex of learning behaviors (evaluation). Bloom defined the six levels as follows:

- **Knowledge:** Recall previously learned material (facts, theories, etc.) in essentially the same form as taught.
- **Comprehension:** See relationships, concepts, and abstractions beyond the simple remembering of material. Typically involves translating, interpreting, and estimating future trends.
- **Application:** Use learned material in new and concrete situations, including the application of rules, methods, concepts, principles, laws, and theories.
- **Analysis:** Break down material into its component parts so that the organizational structure may be understood, including the identification of the parts, analysis of the relationships between parts, and recognition of the organizational principles involved.
- **Synthesis:** Put parts together to form new patterns or structures, such as a unique communication (a theme or speech), a plan of operations (a research proposal), or a set of abstract relationship (schemes for classifying information).
- **Evaluation:** Judge the value of material for a given purpose. Learning in this area is the highest in the cognitive hierarchy because it involves elements of all the other categories, plus conscious value judgments based on clearly defined criteria.”

Qualitative Measures.

Quantitative Measures.