Harold Washington College

Glossary of Assessment Terms

Complied by Cecilia L. López

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, such as student surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys, to yield important information. Surveys are **Indirect Measures** of student learning since they do not provide direct evidence of student learning, development, and achievement. Carefully constructed surveys can, however, provide evidence of students' *perceptions* of changes in their attitudes and values.

Assessment. Assessment of student learning is a comprehensive process that:

- is structured, ongoing, systematic, and sustainable;
- is focused on understanding and improving student learning, student development, student engagement, and student achievement;
- uses assessment results (aggregate data and information) to improve pedagogy, classroom instruction, the curriculum, learning resources, and student services.

After a national survey of how practitioners at colleges and universities defined assessment as a process, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) offered the following definition:

> "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.).

In 1992, the AAHE published the "**Nine Principles of Good Practice in Assessing Student Learning**," which was developed by Trudy Banta, Patricia Cross, Peter Ewell, and Elaine El-Khawas. As stated by Karen W. Bauer in *The Primer for Institutional Research* (2003), "these principles consolidate ideas about effective assessment practice and can provide a guide for future assessment plans and implementation. The nine principles are as follows:

1. Assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also, and equally, to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

5. Assessment work best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives across the educational community are involved.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

At Harold Washington College, the faculty on the Assessment Committee stated (*2005-07 College Catalog*) that "to be effective, the assessment process involves:

1. Establishing faculty expectations for student learning and attainment that are explicitly and publicly stated and that set standards for the quality of the learning experience as well as its outcomes;

2. Aligning assessment activities, methods, and instruments with the learning outcomes expected by the faculty;

3. Gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence of student development and attainment to determine how well their performance aligns with faculty's stated expectations and standards;

4. Using assessment information from both direct and indirect measures:

   a. To examine assumptions about learning;

   b. To understand how, when, and where learning takes place;

   c. To identify in what areas and for which students learning needs to be improved;

   d. To encourage efforts to make changes in modes of instruction, program curricula, learning resources, and support services designed to improve student learning;

   e. To create and sustain an institutional culture in which it is the College's priority to assure."

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 Taxonomy. 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."

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).

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Course Objectives. Course objectives are written from the instructor's perspective; they reflect the instructor's thinking as to what learning environment and activities, special assignments, projects, and/or the course content you, as the instructor, plan on introducing or emphasizing throughout the course. Course Objectives answer such questions as: What are my intentions for this course? What do I want students to understand and learn in this class and how will they learn it.

(Example of a Course Objective from ESL Level 5: "This course focuses on developing your communicative abilities in order for you to engage fully in academic situations. Activities include listening tasks, movie viewing, guided conversations, group discussion, class presentations, and pronunciation practice."

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. A method by which judgments are made about the relative value, worth, usefulness, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, or productivity of academic programs (i.e., program review), functional units, policies, procedures, processes, practices, and people.

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. An example of an **indirect** measure, which has been used by a number of the City Colleges of Chicago, is the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).

Note: a **Direct Measure** is used when the desired learning outcomes are observable and measurable; **Indirect Measures**, such as surveys or questionnaires, are used when the learning outcomes are not directly assessable (e.g., valuing team work, respect for human diversity).

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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. The *California Critical Thinking Skills Test* (CCTST) is an example of a standardized test that is criterion-referenced. Kent State University (KSU) is in the process of piloting a standardized test for information literary called *SAILS* (*Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills*), which is a joint project of KSU and the Association of Research Libraries. Both measures have been employed by the faculty of Harold Washington College. All of the City Colleges of Chicago faculty use ACT's *COMPASS* test as a placement test; some also use it as a post-test, that is, as an exit exam to determine readiness for the next level course. The *CCTST, SAILS,* and the *COMPASS* are all examples of **direct** measures of student learning. An example of an **indirect** measure, which is also a standardized measure, is the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).

Locally Developed Measures. Faculty developed instruments of student learning. Harold Washington College's faculty developed a two-part measure, a survey (indirect measure) and a test (direct measure) for its learning outcomes for the goals the College has for the Arts and the Humanities. HWC faculty also developed the HWC *Survey of Human Diversity* to assess students' perceptions regarding the goals and values the College holds for human diversity. Both measures have been administered to several thousand students by faculty who volunteered a class period during HWC's Assessment Week.

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 Outcomes. A specific statement that identifies what precisely will a student be able to *know, do,* or *perform (cognitive or behavioral domains)* or act responsibly in an ethical, professional, or civic manner or take social responsibility (*affective domain*) as the result of a program, course, or educational experience (e.g., internship, service learning, observation, lab experiment).

It is helpful when the learning outcomes statement begins with a sentence such as: "Upon successful completion of this course, students will:_____." What follows should be a series of action verbs (check out Bloom's Taxonomy for a list) that may include some low level skills but should focus on

higher order thinking skills, competencies, and knowledge across appropriate domains (i.e., cognitive, affective, behavioral, and psychomotor). Well developed Learning Outcomes also identify the standards for achievement or the criteria for performance that will meet the stated **Course Objectives**.

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).

Following is an example of **HWC's Learning Outcomes for "Understanding and Respect for Human Diversity"** that were developed and approved by the faculty on the Assessment Committee:

Definition:
Human Diversity describes variations within the full range of cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial practices through which human beings share life in common spaces. Experiences of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, physical attributes and disabilities, age, health, language, education, political beliefs, and other differences in cultural expression and tradition.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon completion of significant educational experiences at HWC, students will:

- Analyze and discuss contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions in a diverse setting;

- Identify and respect that there are various ways of thinking, communicating, and interacting, for example, by working with culturally diverse groups towards a larger goal;

- Evaluate diverse moral and intellectual perspectives, principles, systems, and structures;

- Articulate the value of cross cultural campus and community activities and their impact on the lives of others.

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