

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

The Assessment of Individual Student Learning and the Assessment of an Educational Program

NOTE: Must; Shall; Will: Should: May or Could; Can:	Clarification of Terms These words or phrases indicate actions or activities that are <i>essential</i> or <i>mandatory</i> . This word implies that it is highly desirable to perform certain actions or activities, but not essential or mandatory. These words imply freedom or liberty to follow an alternative to the action or activity being presented in a document.
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Introduction

This section was developed to assist faculty in determining how to assess (or measure) what individual students are learning in their specific course(s). It was also developed to assist faculty and Department Chairs to determine how effective a cohort of students has **been**.

As a result of effective assessment of individual learners and groups of learners, faculty members will be able to improve learning that is taking place in their course as well as contribute to the overall success of their students in their program of study.

Most faculty at Columbia College, like most faculty in universities and colleges throughout North America, are subject or discipline specialists. Their formal education is in a discipline like nursing or criminal justice and most of their experience has been in their field of training and not in the field of assessment.

Therefore, it is not unusual for this group of people to be anxious when they learn that a critical part of their responsibility as a faculty member is to both assess their individual students as well as to take the necessary steps to contribute to the assessment of all the learners enrolled in their program.

The intent here is to both assist faculty members who have a formal degree in education and assist faculty members who do not have a formal degree in education but have other specialized degrees or training, such as a master's degree in social work and facilitate in a professional program at the College. The former group should find this information a valuable review while the latter will hopefully find this a good introduction.

There are two types of programs in higher education (at the college and university level). One type of program is referred to as an accredited program while the other is non-accredited. Institutions that offer accredited programs tend to attract more students. Accredited programs tend to be more recognized by employers as well as higher education institutions. This means their graduates have more employment and further education opportunities in their future. Columbia College wants its graduates to be successful in the workplace as well as in further education. Therefore, it wants all of its programs to be accredited either by the government or a recognized accrediting body. At this point some programs at Columbia are accredited while others are seeking accreditation. One of the key requirements of accrediting bodies is that faculty are effectively engaged in both the assessment of their individual course learners as well as in their overall program.

It should be understood that almost all accrediting bodies are looking for evidence that programs are learner centered and not faculty centered. A faculty centered program is one in which faculty are primarily focused on what topics they will cover in a specific course, whereas a

learner centered program is one in which faculty are primarily concerned with what the student(s) learned as a result of taking each specific course in the program.

For means of clarity, a course at Columbia College, like most post-secondary institutions normally consists of some 36 to 40 hours of classroom work that is led by one facilitator (faculty member) and often concludes with a final exam, paper, or some other form of assessment. For example, a course may be titled Introduction to Psychology 101. However a program, such as a Diploma in Human Services will consist of 20 courses, one of which will be Psychology 101.

It is important that faculty understand that their course does not stand alone but is actually an important part of an overall program. It is one of their responsibilities to make sure they clearly understand what knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours students should acquire while completing their course and how this contributes to the overall development of each learner as he/she acquires additional knowledge, skills and professional behaviours that result in a well rounded and competent graduate who is capable of becoming an effective member of a work group or is capable of furthering his/her education.

While the assessment of student learning by individual faculty members occurs throughout the length of each course in a program, it should be understood that a Department Chair at Columbia College will lead faculty through a multi-year (3 to 5 years) assessment of a program. Each year is usually devoted to a more in-depth assessment of one or more specific program learning objectives. The primary focus of the assessment is to answer the question, "Are students learning, how is their learning being measured, and is what they are learning relevant to their discipline, occupation or profession?"

Different Approaches to Assessment

Although standardized assessment terms have not been agreed upon in higher education, the following 7 terms are used at Columbia College. A description of each is included. By looking at individual test or assessment results in a course we can assess the performance of a student, yet by looking at an entire group of students' test or assessment results in a program we can assess the effectiveness of a program.

1. Traditional and Performance Measures of Assessment. Whereas traditional measures of assessment are based on multiple-choice and true-false exams, performance measures require students to demonstrate what they have learned such as measuring the heart rate.
2. Authentic Measures of Assessment. An authentic assessment involves real world demonstration of what a student has learned. At Columbia College this is usually demonstrated at an employment site while the student is enrolled in a cooperative education course.
3. Development Assessment Measures. This set of assessments will help us to track the development of individual students over the course of the program. Students may be required to meet specific standards in one assessment in order to continue to the next level of the program. For example, Columbia's Practical Nurse Program requires a student to successfully complete one semester of training before continuing on to the next.

4. Direct and Indirect Measures of Assessment. In order to conduct direct measures of assessment, students must demonstrate they have achieved something. Indirect measurements are often based on one's opinion. This area is very large and important and therefore will be presented in greater detail in another section.
5. Assessments That Result in Quantitative or Qualitative Data. Whereas quantitative data is based on numerical scores that indicate how much was learned (eg., exams, papers, projects), qualitative data are usually described verbally or in writing (eg., interviews, focus groups, or surveys).
6. Assessments Involving Value-Added or Absolute Judgments. A value-added assessment is an assessment that demonstrates the learner has acquired more knowledge or skills than when he/she started. An absolute assessment will be used to demonstrate that each learner has acquired a predetermined set of knowledge or skills. Absolute assessments are most common at Columbia.
7. Assessments May Serve a Formative and/or Summative Purpose. A formative assessment will provide feedback (including advice, counsel, guidance) to the learner to help him/her improve, whereas a summative assessment gives the student a final grade or specific statement of what he/she achieved. At Columbia College faculty provide formative assessments to students while they are taking a course. This normally takes place during each daily class. Faculty then provide summative assessments at the end of the course.