

Defining Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning can be defined as *the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning.*

- Assessment is a kind of “action research,” intended not so much to generate broad theories as to inform local action.
- Educational situations contain too many variables to make “proof” possible. Therefore, assessment gathers indicators that will be useful for decision making.
- Assessment does not limit itself only to learning that can be objectively tested. It need not be a reductive exercise. Rather, a department can state its highest goals, including goals such as students’ ethical development, understanding of diversity, and the like. Then it can seek the best available indicators about whether those goals are being met.
- Assessment does not require standardized tests or “objective” measures. Faculty regularly assess complex work in their fields and make judgments about its quality; in assessment of learning, faculty make informed professional judgments about critical thinking, scientific reason, or other qualities in student work, and then use those judgments to inform departmental and institutional decisions.
- Assessment means basing decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, advising, and student support upon the best possible data about student learning and the factors that affect it.
- A great deal of assessment is already occurring in responsible classrooms, departments, and institutions, though we have not always called it that.
- Assessment can move beyond the classroom to become program assessment:

Classroom assessment: The teacher of the senior capstone course evaluates her students’ final projects, assigns grades, and uses the information for her own improvement next semester.

Program assessment: The faculty teaching the senior capstone report annually to the department, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the students’ work in relation to departmental learning goals. The department uses these and other data, such as student and alumni questionnaires, to inform decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, and other factors that affect student learning.

Work Cited

Walvoord, B. E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*, (pp. 2-3). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.