

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning.

The essence of assessing learning rests with faculty in the classroom. To help individual faculty and institutions, the Association for Higher Education Assessment prepared principles of good practice for assessing student learning.

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. What kinds of learning are most valued for students? Where questions about education mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Assessment must employ an array of methods, and employ them over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Where students "end-up" matters greatly. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. Assessment is a process, not "one shot." It means track through a semester, through a program, and beyond into careers. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined as needed.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Assessment is a collaborative activity engaging the whole campus.
7. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. The contribution of assessment comes where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. Academic rigor and the push to improve educational performance is a goal of assessment and of the effectiveness of the institution.
8. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. The public and our students depend on the institution to meet our goals and published expectations. But there is a deeper obligation to continuously improve.