

Assessment Knowledge -Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do we have three "levels" to our assessment plan? Clue: The levels are "General Knowledge," "Program" and "Course."

Because each level allows for a unique set of questions to be asked about student learning. The first level asks questions about the quality of student learning in terms of "General Knowledge," or the set of learning expectations we have for all of our students, no matter their programs of study. General Knowledge is comprised of four goals, "Gewkdag," conceptualization, interpersonal skills, and communication. The goals were drafted by the faculty to reflect the mission and goals of the college.

The second level asks questions about the quality of learning within Programs, the learning expectations we have for students pursuing particular programs of study at TOCC. The programs may be degrees, certificates or some other faculty-determined set of courses.

The third level asks questions about the quality of learning within Courses. This level focuses on the quality of performance objectives, classroom assessment practices and day-to-day instruction.

The three levels of assessment are regarded as a best practice by the Higher Learning Commission. The Commission lists assessment of multiple levels (institution, program and course) as an example of evidence for "Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching." See also the Commission's Handbook of Accreditation.

2. What is the difference between "Institutional Effectiveness" and "Student Learning Outcomes Assessment"?

The two processes differ in several important ways. They differ in purpose. Student Learning Outcomes Assessment strives to improve learning within the college. Institutional Effectiveness, on the other hand, assesses program viability, cost effectiveness, and how closely it reflects the mission and goals of the college.

The two processes also differ in who is responsible for them. Faculty hold the primary responsibility for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment. The responsibility for Institutional Effectiveness belongs to the Division of Research and Development. Of course others play roles in the two processes, but the primary responsibility for each rests with these constituencies. The two processes are not entirely independent, however. They have different ends, but their constituencies collaborate in sharing student data.

3. What ties Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to the mission and goals of the college?

The answer is, in short, student learning outcomes. The four General Knowledge goals, in particular, were drafted to reflect the mission and goals of the college.

4. What is the difference between direct and indirect measures of learning, and which type is employed by the assessment committee?

The difference between direct and indirect measures of learning depends on whether or not there is an intermediary between student performance and the assessment practice.

For example, a student taking a test measuring a specific learning outcome would be an example of a direct measure of learning. The assessment instrument directly measures student performance. A employer discussing a former student's job performance would be an example of an indirect

measure of learning, since job performance acts as an intermediary between student learning and the assessment practice.

The Assessment Committee incorporates both direct and indirect measures of learning into the assessment process. Multiple measures of learning improve the likelihood of accurate conclusions.

5. Should student grades be used for assessment purposes?

No. Student grades are not always good indicators of learning, since factors other than learning go into their determination.

6. Is "General Knowledge" assessment the same as "AGEC" assessment?

No. General Knowledge at TOCC is not equivalent to the *Arizona General Education Curriculum* (AGEC). AGEC is a core block of classes within a degree program which are transferable to another Arizona public college or university. General Knowledge at TOCC, on the other hand, reflects the unique values of our college and its mission, and encompasses more than transfer degrees.

7. What does it mean when assessment people say, "Have you closed the loop?"

It means, "have you used the results of your assessment to improve the curriculum and teaching?"