

IU East Assessment Plan 2011

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 (Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p. 7).

Assessment. An evaluated activity or task used by a program or unit to determine the extent to which specific learning proficiencies, outcomes, or standards have been mastered. Assessments usually include an instrument that details the task or activity and a scoring guide used to evaluate the task or activity.

Assessment Data. Quantified information communicating the results of an evaluative activity or task designed to determine the extent to which specific learning proficiencies, outcomes, or standards have been met.

Assessment is the process of gathering and analyzing information about various facets of students learning. As such it integrates three separate, yet interdependent, approaches to the student learning environment. First, learning outcomes identified for general education and within degree programs focus specifically on what students are expected to learn. Second, students are provided with learning opportunities through co-curricular programs, which support and enrich the learning that occurs in the classroom. Third, students need to have a learning environment which is conducive to their continued success and timely progress toward graduation.

The overarching goal of assessment is to enter into a constant state of assessment, reflection, and improvement with the intent of on-going institutional improvement. IU East has made the commitment to create a comprehensive system of assessment that includes the following major components:

- General Education Assessment
- Program Assessment
- Co-Curricular Assessment
- ETS Proficiency Profile
- National Survey of Student Engagement
- Student Satisfaction Survey
- Institutional Priorities Survey
- Institutional Assessment Survey

General Education Assessment

Guided by the General Education Committee, information is collected in more than 100 sections of courses that coincide with the General Education Framework. Data is collected each fall semester and analyzed in the spring semester.

Program Assessment

Each degree program has stated learning goals and a plan to gather formative information about student learning. Many of the assessment plans involve the use of curriculum maps to gather information about student learning at key points in the program. All degree programs have a capstone course or culminating senior experience for summative assessment.

Co-Curricular Assessment

Still under development, co-curricular assessment has great potential for collecting information about the learning that occurs outside of the classroom.

ETS Proficiency Profile

IU East will launch this initiative in Fall 2012 as part of the voluntary system of accountability.

National Survey of Student Engagement

Freshmen and seniors at IU East are encouraged to participate in the NSSE each spring semester. IU East has participated in most years and this longitudinal data is a significant source of indirect assessment. Select questions are also correlated with IU East general education outcomes to provide additional information about student attainment.

Student Satisfaction Inventory

This Noel-Levitz survey was administered to students across campus in December 2007. It yielded very useful information that led to improvements in the academic advising system. The campus should administer the SSI at regular intervals every 3-4 years. The next suggested administration date is fall 2011.

Institutional Priorities Survey

This Noel-Levitz survey was distributed to faculty and staff, and is the counterpart of the Student Satisfaction Inventory. Faculty and staff have a vested interest in student success, and information from these groups can offer salient information about opportunities for improvement. The IPS should be administered on the same schedule as the Student Satisfaction Inventory.

Institutional Assessment

A survey has been created and distributed to the deans and other administrators who compose the Academic Affairs Cabinet. This assessment will be administered annually and will serve as a

gauge as to how the campus leaders assess the overall progress that the campus is making in its assessment efforts.

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

The primary promise of any institution of higher learning is that students will learn and continue to develop the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for them to succeed as citizens and professionals. Those students actually do learn is not really a question, but how well and how much they learn is often a matter of anecdotal evidence. The assessment movement of the last 25 years has required that we all ask: What are students learning and how do we know? This evidence-based approach has led higher education professionals to develop systematic, quantitative/qualitative methods for defining student learning outcomes and measuring student performance against those outcomes.

Defining the expectations for the learning enterprise is the core of a successful assessment program. These expectations provide the structure which supports and defines all else. Most important, however, is the fact that student learning outcomes are direct measures of student learning, focusing on what students know, do, and value. They are related to specific tasks and can be objectively defined. So while course evaluations, grade point averages, placement rates, and even satisfaction surveys may tell us a great deal about how and why students are or are not succeeding, they do not tell us what students have learned.

Academic assessment requires four basic elements. First, there must be clear and measurable outcomes that are defined by faculty. Second, there must be mechanisms for measuring individual and collective student performance against those outcomes. This collection of assessment data is a continuing process which relies solely on faculty. Third, the data must be used to make informed, data-driven decisions regarding program improvement. The academic deans must lead this process, working with the faculty to modify programs based on assessment data. And finally, there must be a means for delivering the information about student success to those who can and will improve the learning environment, namely faculty and academic leadership. In particular, the senior academic leaders must provide resources to support improvements based upon assessment information.

Indirect Assessment

Ultimately, to complete the assessment process, the needs and perceptions of all those who are invested in IU East must be part of the picture. From students to faculty, staff and administrators, the individuals who compose the IU East community have a wealth of information. The process of gathering this information should be thoughtful and focused. Like course evaluations, the information collected through surveys should be purposeful. IU East already has a number of surveys in place that are used to gather information from students and others. Opportunities exist to expand the indirect assessment efforts to include alumni, employers and other community members. As this area of assessment matures, the surveys utilized will be reviewed, coordinated, and revised to maximize their contribution to specific decision-making processes.

Closing the Loop

The collection of information about student achievement in isolation is not enough. That information needs to be routinely and frequently delivered to faculty and academic leadership. The data should be used to improve course syllabi and teaching practices, so it must be shared among faculty. The data must also be available to those who oversee and make decisions about academic programs, funding, personnel and other resources necessary to maintain a high quality educational environment. Assessment should be a key component in evaluating the overall effectiveness of every academic program and should be used in every program review and specialized accreditation to showcase the robust learning environments that have been created at IU East.

It is critical to remember that our goal is to systematically collect useful information, not to create reports for their own sake. To this end, as tools and processes for gathering information on student academic achievement are developed, we must remember to keep every step simple and manageable. There will be no value for students or for IU East if all of our resources are consumed in the process of gathering data and none are available to make use of the data to improve student learning.

Finally, as the culture of assessment grows, information on individual student achievement must belong to the students themselves. When students have accurate information about the learning goal of their programs, they can more readily assess their own progress, learning capacities, and proficiencies, and can make wise decisions about how to focus their time and energy as learners.