

Program/Discipline Review Glossary

A glossary of terms related to assessment and educational effectiveness is provided below. Many of these terms have multiple meanings and/or have been used in different ways by different associations, institutions, and individuals. The definitions that follow represent the way Highline College typically uses these words for purposes of review and reporting. If there are questions or need for clarification, please feel free to contact the Assessment Committee at assessment@highline.edu.

A

AAC&U

see "Association of American Colleges and Universities."

Academic freedom

allows all faculty to seek and present knowledge in their respective disciplines. Faculty should be free to explore problems and issues without fear of interference from administrators, the Board, governmental agencies, the public, students, or parents of students. Faculty have a basic responsibility to promote freedom of thought, expression, and the pursuit of knowledge. Faculty have an obligation to protect students' right to freedom of inquiry. In using potentially controversial materials, the faculty member has the obligation to ensure the material meets the valid educational objectives of the class. Faculty have the responsibility to exercise reasonableness and good judgment in their presentations and to function within the ethics and standards of their respective disciplines and the teaching profession.

Accountability

in higher education, being answerable to the public, e.g., students, policymakers, employers. Historically, accountability has focused on financial resources; emphasis now extends to students' academic progress, including retention, acquisition of knowledge and skills, and degree completion.

Accreditation

the process by which a private, non-governmental body evaluates an educational institution or program of study and formally recognizes it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards. The process involves initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by peers.

Accrediting body

An accrediting body is formally acknowledged, or recognized, as being a reliable authority concerning the quality of education or training offered by educational institutions or programs by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. It is a voluntary organization and not established by the federal or state governments or any agency, department, or office thereof. An accrediting body may be identified by scope (institutional or specialized program) or area (regional, interregional, or national).

Alignment

a logical connection between the curriculum and the expected outcomes. Example: curriculum mapping is an alignment activity: the curriculum is analyzed to determine when, where, and how students are introduced to expected outcomes and then given opportunities to develop and demonstrate achievement. The "map" visually displays where outcomes are emphasized in the curriculum.

Assessment (of student learning)

an ongoing, iterative process consisting of four basic steps: 1. defining learning outcomes; 2. choosing a method or approach and then using it to gather evidence of learning; 3. analyzing and interpreting

the evidence; and 4. using this information to improve student learning.

Assessment method

a way to collect evidence of student learning.

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

Washington-based national organization dedicated to promotion of liberal learning and its integration with professional and civic education.

B

Benchmark

a point of reference or standard of excellence in relation to which something can be compared and judged. A specific level of student performance may serve as the benchmark that students are expected to meet at a particular point in time or developmental level. Retention and graduation rates may also be benchmarked against those of peer institutions or national norms.

C

Capstone

a culminating project or experience, usually associated with undergraduates but also applicable to graduate education, that generally takes place in the student's final year of study and requires review, synthesis, and application of what has been learned over the course of the student's college experience. The result may be a product (e.g., original research, an innovative engineering design, an art exhibit) or a performance (e.g., a recital, an internship, student teaching). The capstone can provide evidence for assessment of a range of outcomes, e.g., core competencies, general education outcomes, and institution-level outcomes, as well as those for the major or graduate degree.

CLO

course learning outcome. see
"outcome."

Closing the Loop

Using assessment results for improvement and/or evolution.

Co-curricular learning

learning that takes place in activities and programs that are not part of the prescribed sequence of courses in an academic program.

College

a term with multiple meanings in U.S. usage: 1. historically, a small, undergraduate liberal arts institution; 2. a generic term, sometimes used as a synonym for university, to denote any postsecondary educational institution, including universities; 3. a grouping of related disciplines within a university, e.g., College of Engineering.

Comparative data

data drawn from other sources: from within or, more typically, from outside the institution. Comparative data can enhance meaning and contextual understanding of the primary data being reviewed and analyzed.

Competency

in assessment of student learning, a specific skill, body of knowledge, or disposition; can also refer to the student's ability to demonstrate that learning. "Competency" is sometimes used interchangeably with "outcome," "objective," and "ability."

Completion, also degree completion

signifies that students are able to graduate, having completed all requirements for their degree or certificate; sometimes used as a synonym for "graduation."

Core competencies

as defined in the Highline College catalog, core competencies are abilities that students, upon successfully completing their courses of study, will be able to demonstrate in the following areas. The 6 core competencies are Think Critically, Reason Quantitatively, Communicate Effectively, Develop Information and Visual Literacy, Develop Community and Social Responsibility, and Develop Globalism Perspectives.

Course

A single instructional subject commonly described by title, number, credits, and expected learning outcomes in the college catalog or bulletin

Course section

a differentiation of classes offered of the same subject and course number.

Curriculum map

tool that illustrates the relationship between student learning outcomes (SLOs), courses, and assessments in an educational program. Programs indicate which course(s) address each of the SLOs, the proficiency level achieved in the course (i.e., whether students were introduced to the SLO, practiced the SLO, and/or mastered the SLO in the course), and the method of assessment for each SLO.

D

Department

an administrative unit that may include programs or disciplines (e.g., AEIS, Anthropology, Business, History, Life, Ocean, & General Sciences and World Languages)

Discipline

refers to programs of study leading to an Associate's degree (AA/AS) that transfers to a baccalaureate institution (e.g., Mathematics, Psychology, English, Biology). These may be referred to as "transfer disciplines" within this document. The ELCAP program is also included here.

E

Educational effectiveness

producing the intended learning results in an educational endeavor. As used by NWCCU, educational effectiveness includes clear and appropriate educational outcomes and objectives; and alignment at the institutional and program level of resources and processes, including assessment, to ensure delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded. At the institutional level, findings about learning are integrated into planning, budgeting, and decision making.

Embedded assessment

a minimally intrusive and efficient method of collecting evidence of learning using the work or

performances that students produce in response to course assignments.

Evaluation

a process for measuring and judging the quality of performance of an institution, a program, a process, or individuals, e.g., instructors, administrators. While assessment of student learning and evaluation processes are related, they do differ and it is best not to use the terms interchangeably.

Experiential learning

see “prior learning assessment.”

External

outside. In higher education, “external” may mean outside of the immediate department or unit, outside of the division or college, or outside of the institution. Including external representatives in quality assurance processes can provide insight into program quality and areas for improvement; it also lends greater credibility to reviews and institutional claims to quality.

F

Focus group

a qualitative assessment method that uses small-group discussions, led by a facilitator and following a protocol, to gather information about attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Responses are recorded and then analyzed.

Although focus groups are usually considered an indirect method, they have been used to provide direct evidence, e.g., of students’ ability to apply learning or demonstrate institutional values.

Formative Assessment

ongoing assessment that takes place during the learning process. It is intended to improve an individual student's performance, program performance, or overall institutional effectiveness. Formative assessment is used internally, primarily by those responsible for teaching a course or developing and running a program. See also: Summative Assessment

FTES

Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES) include those enrolled for the regular session, annualized summer session, and academic year.

From the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges:

Put simply, headcount refers to the number of physical students enrolled at a college, regardless of how many hours they attend school. In contrast, FTE takes all those students, lumps them together, and divides them by a number of hours to come up with the “full time equivalent.” (The key here is the word “equivalent.” FTE does not mean that the students are actually attending full time.) It’s like counting strawberries by individual berry or by the pint.

- *One Full-Time Equivalent Student (FTES) is the equivalent of one student enrolled for 15 community college credits per quarter.*
- *Headcount is the actual number of students enrolled, regardless of credit hours per student. Example:*
 - *One student taking a full academic load of 15 credits is the equivalent of one FTES.*
 - *If three students are each taking one five-credit class, together they total one FTES.*

What is the definition of a full- and part-time student?

Full-time status can be viewed in two ways:

- *Financial aid eligibility: For the purposes of awarding federal and state financial aid, a full-time*

student is enrolled for 12 or more credits per quarter. A part-time student is enrolled for 11 or fewer credits. Part-time students can still get financial aid, but their financial aid award is prorated.

- *Academic time to degree: To complete a 90-credit associate degree in two years requires "full-time" attendance of 15 credits per quarter x 3 quarters per year (fall, winter spring) for a total of 45 credits for each of the two years.*

G

General education

the portion of an undergraduate course of study that provides general background knowledge and develops generic higher-order intellectual skills. General education can take many forms. Some programs are "foundational," i.e., students complete required courses before going on to the major; other programs run parallel with study in the major over the entire college career; still others integrate the learning outcomes of general education into other coursework

Goal

1. in assessment of student learning, a high-level, very general statement of learning expected of graduates, aligned with the institution's mission, vision, and values (more specific learning outcomes are derived from goals); 2. a statement developed by an institution or program related to strategic planning, financial development, and other important issues.

H

Higher education

postsecondary education, i.e., beyond high school, leading to academic degrees or credentials.

I

Institutional research

1. collection of institutional data useful for analysis, planning, and accreditation review; 2. the office that collects, organizes, and reports such data.

L

LEAP

see "Liberal Education and America's Promise." Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)

a project of AAC&U, the LEAP outcomes (also known as Essential Learning Outcomes) total 12, grouped under the headings "Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural and Physical World," "Intellectual and Practical Skills," "Personal and Social Responsibility," and "Integrative and Applied Learning."

M

Mission

in higher education, an institution's formally adopted statement of its fundamental reasons for existence, its shared purposes and values, and the students that it aims to serve. The mission is central to decisions about priorities and strategic objectives and provides a context for NWCCU decisions about quality and accreditation.

N

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

a nationally normed, widely administered survey that asks students about behaviors, e.g., how often they ask questions in class, use the library, consult with a professor outside of class. The survey does not assess learning directly; the assumption is that higher engagement will lead to higher levels of retention, completion, and learning. A suite of analogous surveys has been developed for two-year schools, members of a school's faculty, etc.

O

Objective

1. in assessment of student learning, a concise statement of what the instructor (or program or institution) intends a student to learn (on some campuses, objectives then lead to development of learning outcomes); 2. sometimes used interchangeably with "outcome," but "outcome" has become the more common usage because of its more direct focus on the result (or "outcome") for the student; 3. in institution- or program-level planning, more specific statements derived from general goals; 4. in psychometrics, a test consisting of factual questions requiring short answers that can be reliably scored using an answer key, minimizing subjective judgments.

Outcome

1. in assessment of student learning, a concise statement of what the student should know or be able to do. Well-articulated learning outcomes describe how a student can demonstrate the desired outcome; verbs such as "understand" or "appreciate" are avoided in favor of observable actions, e.g., "identify," "analyze." Learning outcomes can be formulated for different levels of aggregation and analysis. Student learning outcomes are commonly abbreviated as SLOs, course learning outcomes as CLOs, program learning outcomes as PLOs, and institution-level outcomes as ILOs. 2. Other outcomes may address access, retention and graduation, and other indicators aligned with institutional mission and goals.

P

Peer review

in higher education, a quality assurance process for purposes of improvement and accreditation that draws upon individuals active in the field of higher education.

Peer reviewer

a person who is professionally qualified to review an educational or other program, either for internal quality assurance and improvement or for accreditation purposes.

Portfolio

A type of performance assessment in which students' work is systematically collected and carefully reviewed for evidence of learning. In addition to examples of their work, most portfolios include reflective statements prepared by students. Portfolios are assessed for evidence of student achievement with respect to established student learning outcomes and standards.

Professional program

an educational program designed to prepare students for a specific profession. It may apply to both undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare students for direct entry into employment. Graduate-level professional programs typically presuppose an undergraduate degree.

Proficiency

the level of knowledge or degree of skill that a student has achieved.

Program

1. a systematic, usually sequential, grouping of courses that forms a considerable part, or all, of the requirements for a degree in a major or professional field; 2. sometimes refers to the total educational offering of an institution.

Program review

a systematic process of examining the capacity, processes, and outcomes of a degree program or department in order to judge its quality and effectiveness and to support improvement. Historically, program review focused primarily on capacity and research output; more recently, educational outcomes and student success have been included. While student success and assessment of learning at the program level are an important part of program review, they should not be confused with the more encompassing process of program review.

Q

Quality assurance

any process for systematic monitoring and evaluation to ensure that standards of quality are being met. Higher education has many traditional processes for quality assurance, including review of courses and programs, tenure review, program review, annual reports, personnel evaluations, peer review of research and publications, and assessment of student learning.

Quantitative reasoning

the ability to apply mathematical concepts to the interpretation and analysis of quantitative information in order to solve a wide range of problems, from those arising in pure and applied research to everyday issues and questions. It may include such dimensions as ability to apply math skills, judge reasonableness, communicate quantitative information, and recognize the limits of mathematical or statistical methods.

R

Research

collection, analysis, and publication of data, studies, or other findings in order to expand a field of knowledge or its application.

Retention

typically refers to the rate at which students return and re-enroll in college from semester to semester and year to year; retention rates from first to second year are of particular interest, since that is when the heaviest attrition is likely to occur. The words “persistence” and “retention” are often used interchangeably. The National Center for Education Statistics, however, differentiates the terms by using “retention” as an institutional measure and “persistence” as a student measure. In other words, institutions retain and students persist.

Rubric

1. a tool for scoring student work or performances, typically in the form of a table or matrix, with criteria that describe the dimensions of the outcome down the left-hand vertical axis, and levels of performance across the horizontal axis. The work or performance may be given an overall score (holistic scoring), or criteria may be scored individually (analytic scoring). Rubrics are also used to communicate expectations to students. 2. WSCUC has developed a number of rubrics to assist teams and institutions in evaluating various aspects of their curriculum and assessment processes.

S

SLO

see “outcome.”

Special Visit

a focused visit, which may be requested by the Commission or less frequently by a standing committee, to follow up on a specific area of concern.

Standard

broadly refers to statements of expectations for student learning, which may include content standards, performance standards, and benchmarks. In the K-12 arena, standards generally describe content, but not level of mastery. In higher education, in contrast, standards generally refer to expected levels of mastery or proficiency. Not to be confused with standards of accreditation.

Standard of performance

the degree of skill or proficiency with which a student demonstrates a learning outcome.

Standards of accreditation

standards of accreditation are the principles used as a basis for judgment in accreditation reviews. NWCCU has four Standards that flow from three Core Commitments. They are used to guide institutions in assessing institutional performance, to identify areas needing improvement, and to serve as the basis for judgment of the institution by evaluation teams and the Senior College and University Commission.

Student success

a phrase often used as shorthand for retention and degree completion. For NWCCU, student success includes quality of learning and rigor as well as retention and completion.

Summative Assessment

the gathering of information at the conclusion of a course, program, or undergraduate/graduate career to improve learning or to meet accountability demands. The purposes are to determine whether or not overall goals have been achieved and to provide information on performance for an individual student or statistics about a course or program for internal or external accountability purposes. Grades are the most common form of summative assessment. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2007) See also: Formative Assessment

Sustainability

ability of an educational institution to maintain effective functioning and improve over the long term. Assumes financial viability, but also availability of human capital and other resources, as well as institutional vision, planning, and flexibility.

T

Team (also accreditation team, evaluation team, visiting team)

a group of peers from the higher education community that is selected and trained to review an institution’s institutional report, data exhibits, and other documents; conduct Offsite and on-site reviews; and write a report on its findings and recommendations.

Transparency

disclosure by postsecondary institutions of information that may be sought by or of interest to policymakers, stakeholders, or the public. Such information may include financial data, retention and graduation rates, and various indicators of educational quality. Transparency and accountability are assumed to be mutually reinforcing.

U

U.S.D.E.

U.S. Department of Education (also D.O.Ed.)

V

VALUE rubrics

Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education. A set of 15 rubrics developed by AAC&U in collaboration with hundreds of faculty to assess learning outcomes defined by the LEAP project. Institutions may download the rubrics at no cost and are encouraged to modify them to suit local needs.

Glossary Sources:

Highline College HCEA Contract:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rFznORXU6fcJkmGMveA-Qln5AkMI3k5e/view>

NWCCU Glossary: <https://nwccu.org/tools-resources/glossary/>

SBCTC Key Data Points and Terminology:

<https://www.sbctc.edu/about/communications/key-data-and-terms.aspx>

WASC Senior College and University Commission Glossary: <https://www.wscuc.org/lexicon/14>