



Toolkit

The Nuts and Bolts Newsletter from

ASSESSMENT SERVICES

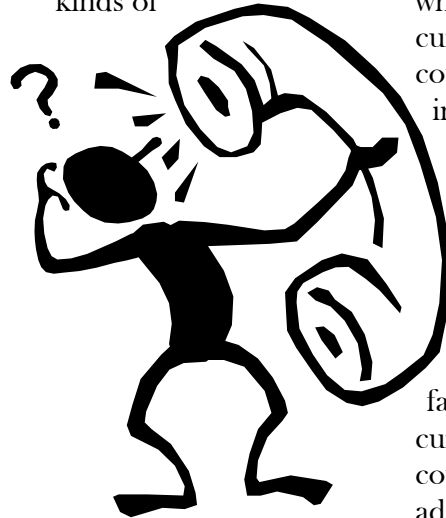
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FAQ: Isn't Assessment EVER Going to Go Away?

All indications suggest that assessment is here to stay. Actually, higher education has been involved in assessment for centuries; what has changed is what is assessed and who conducts the assessments. In our lifetimes in higher education, assessment was primarily an administrative responsibility centered on what we call "inputs" - program costs, the number of faculty, faculty-student ratios, departmental budget allocations, the number

of classrooms and residence halls, and the like. We still do these kinds of



assessments. With the shift in emphasis to the

assessment of "student learning outcomes" in the 1980s, the faculty, who design the curricula and teach the courses, play the most important role in assessing what students know and can do at the end of their programs. That kind of information feeds right back into the faculty work of curriculum updates; course modifications, additions, and deletions; and how we teach.

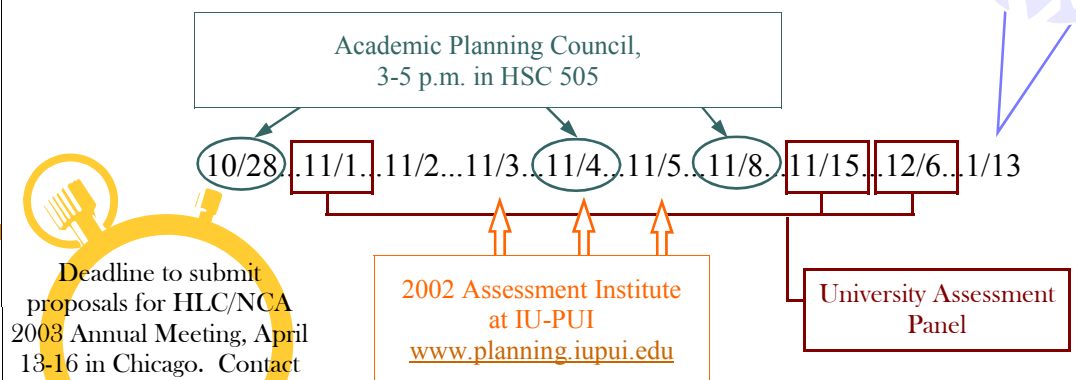
We'd like to hear from you!

What features of *Toolkit* do you find most helpful? What would you like to see?

Submit your feedback or assessment story to:

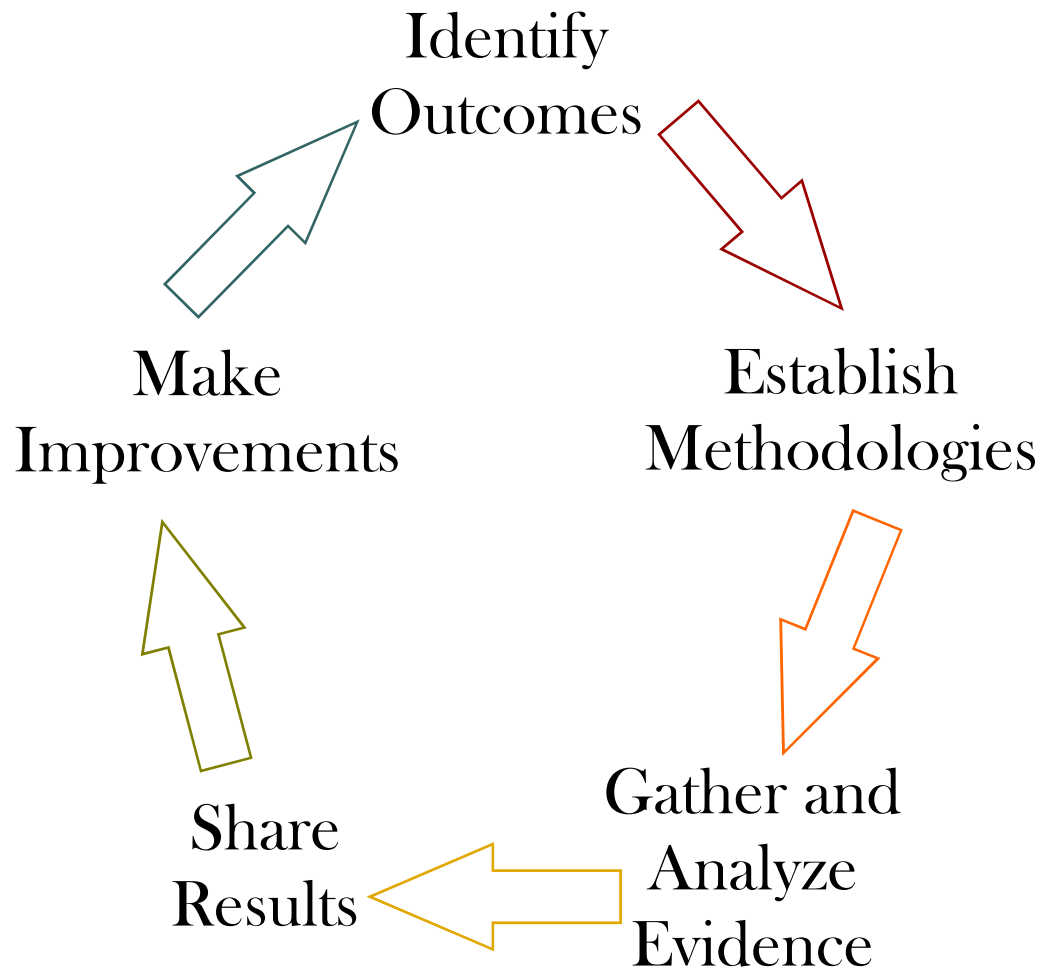
Donna Askins
daskins@niu.edu
753-0816

It's About Time



Deadline to submit proposals for HLC/NCA 2003 Annual Meeting, April 13-16 in Chicago. Contact jdarding@hlcommission.org

Cycle of Assessment



*"Begin
with the end in mind."*

—Stephen Covey

Characteristics of a Good Assessment Plan

The Assessment Services website offers several pointers for those interested in developing an assessment plan that is practical, useful, and holistic:

- ⇒ Utilize multiple sources of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative
- ⇒ Gather evidence most suited to your field
- ⇒ Tie assessment methods directly to program/unit objectives
- ⇒ As you consider direct

and indirect methods (see article on page 3), be sure to choose some of each. Keep in mind that multiple methods for gathering evidence will provide a balanced portrayal of your program or unit when it is reviewed

- ⇒ Use your results to make continuous improvements

Craig Barnard, NIU Assessment Coordinator, adds the following:

- ⇒ Invest appropriate time

and energy in writing a good assessment plan—then stick to it.

- ⇒ Implement your plan and harvest the data on a regular basis.
- ⇒ Use your findings in a proactive way
- ⇒ Keep an open mind to new technology
- ⇒ Know that respecting diverse points of view can be a great way to discover new methods and build a cohesive, effective unit.



Balancing Authentic and Indirect Assessment

Let's cut to the chase: the differences between authentic and indirect assessment can be confusing. Which is which, and what is the purpose of each?

One clear explanation may be found in *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines* (Palomba & Banta, eds., 2001):

"Assessment methods may be categorized as either direct or indirect in the

evidence they produce about learning. Direct assessment methods, such as performance measures and objective tests, actually demonstrate learning. In contrast, indirect assessment methods, such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, provide reflections about learning."

Therefore, a good assessment plan should include at least one direct and one indirect method for each outcome. Here are a few examples of each.

DIRECT ASSESSMENT

- ☐ Comprehensive exam
- ☐ Writing proficiency exam
- ☐ National or state licensure exam
- ☐ Senior thesis/major project

INDIRECT ASSESSMENT


- ☐ Job placement
- ☐ Employer survey
- ☐ Alumni honors and awards
- ☐ Patient satisfaction

"We professors know implicitly in our souls the value of what we do. The public does not."


Ten Good Reasons to Conduct Assessment

Assessment may seem dry and pointless. It might be perceived as "busy work" or "paper work." But you can use assessment to ...

 1 Improve student learning


Maintain accreditation 


Satisfy the demand for accountability from external agencies 

Improve student services, and hence, student satisfaction 


 5 Quickly show how you meet (or

exceed!) standards of excellence

 6 Demonstrate concretely that you do what you say do

Be an MVP by identifying areas for improvement 

Justify your budget 

Show how your work makes a measurable difference in the lives of students, and ultimately, their employers and constituents 



Douglas Eder of SIU Edwardsville writes, "We professors know implicitly in our souls the value of what we do. The public does not, and it won't tolerate institutions that cannot demonstrate they produce a quality product. What is the quality of our product, how do we measure it authentically, and how do we communicate it effectively to those who are buying it or making policy decisions? That's why we 'do' assessment."

Need Help?

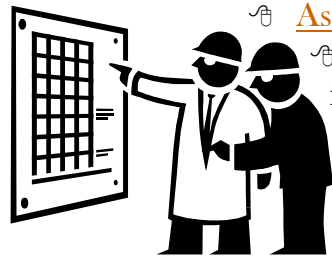
Assessment and related help is readily available. Numbers to call at NIU include:

Craig Barnard, Assessment Coordinator 753-7120

Sherry Wisdom, Assessment Secretary 753-8659

Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief of *Toolkit* 753-0816

Or, try these useful assessment links:

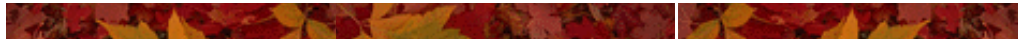


[Assessment handbooks](#)

The [ERIC Clearinghouse for Assessment](#), which includes print media such as journals and books, as well as a [Test Locator](#) to search for instruments

Links to [student assessment of courses and faculty](#), including methodologies, summaries of research, and more.

It never hurts to ask a question.



The Office of Assessment Services assists NIU academic programs, learning centers and student services units in developing their assessment plans. Its mission statement focuses on excellence and continuous quality improvement.



Toolkit anticipates publication approximately five times each academic year:

Beginning of Fall semester

Fall mid-term

Beginning of Spring semester

Spring mid-term

Beginning of Summer semester