



# Toolkit

The Nuts and Bolts Newsletter from

ASSESSMENT

SERVICES

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## Assessment Mailbag: Direct Assessment

**Q:** I hear a lot about “direct” assessment methods. What are they, and how could I use them?

**A:** Good question! The term “direct” assessment, in the context of the university’s assessment process, refers to assessments that require students to display their knowledge and skills as

they respond to the instrument itself (direct response): the evidence obtained is not “an opinion of” or “thoughts about” or survey data.

*Direct* assessments may include the results of:

- locally developed objective and essay tests.
- the capstone experience (e.g., course, thesis, field project).

• portfolios of student work (based on stated protocol, including the contents and criteria for evaluation).

- oral examinations and defenses.
- essay questions blind scored by faculty across the department, division, school, or college.
- standardized and

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### DID YOU KNOW?

## CIRP – Cooperative Institutional Research Program

Before starting their first year at NIU, students complete the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) *Annual Freshman Survey*. Findings from the most recent survey include:

- 44% of new freshmen indicated that NIU’s academic reputation was an important factor in their

decision to attend NIU.

- 33% of students indicated that low tuition was important.
- 81% indicated that it is very important to them to be very well off financially.
- 64% of new freshmen indicated that it is very important to them to help others in difficulty.
- 33% reported that it is

very important to them to integrate spirituality into their life.

- 78% of new freshmen estimated their chances as being very good that they will graduate from NIU.

Survey results can be merged with additional surveys to identify specific factors associated with student achievement.

*The College of Business' journey began with the gentle nudging of the university through its internal mandate for departmental programs to have assessment plans in place.*

### ***Direct Assessment Continued from page 1***

nationally normed tests, if the examinations measure the specific learning expected in the program.

- performance on national licensure, certification or professional exams.
- qualitative internal and external juried review of comprehensive senior projects.
- externally reviewed exhibitions and performances.
- external evaluation of

performance during internships based on stated program objectives.

- course-embedded measures other than tests used for course grades (Note: See article in this current edition of Toolkit which discusses course-embedded assessment).

Higher Learning Commission North Central Association evaluators regularly stress that neither grades nor GPAs are adequate or reliable evidence of student learning across an

undergraduate major or graduate/professional program of study. [Alexander Astin](#), in his 1991 work *Assessment for Excellence*, states that course grades and GPAs “tell us little of what the student has actually learned in the course” and “very little about what a student actually knows or what that student’s competencies or talents really are.” (p. 11)

*The next issue of Toolkit will discuss indirect assessment.*

## **COLLEGE OF BUSINESS**

### **AACSB Cites Assessment as an Effective Practice at NIU**

During the recent, successfully completed NIU accreditation review, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) Peer Review Team cited assessment as one of five “exceptionally effective practices that demonstrate leadership and high quality continuous improvement in management or accounting education, particularly relative to its set of comparison groups” employed by the [College of Business](#). In its summary report, the Team observed that:

“Assessment processes are conducted at the college level and in the departments....there is a

philosophy and spirit of assessment that permeates the college.”

The NIU College of Business’ journey toward infusing the philosophy and spirit of assessment began in the 1990s...with the gentle nudging of the university through its internal mandate for departmental programs to have assessment plans and continuous improvement processes in place.

Identification of outcomes common across all undergraduate business majors commenced in 1997. Independently, departments diligently worked on developing their own learning outcomes, tailoring college-wide goals to their specific program goals. Once

learning outcomes were established at both the college and department levels, direct and indirect assessment techniques were explored and, where deemed appropriate, instituted.

While the words of Dr. Robert Taylor, AACSB Visit Team Chair, “The college is ahead of the curve on [business school] assessment,” still echo in the corridors of Barsema Hall, the sign for the next curve on the road looms near: By 2007, AACSB expects schools to include feedback of the assessment data into the curriculum review process...no time to waste.

—David K. Graf, Dean  
NIU College of Business

## ASSESSMENT IN ACTION:

## Career Planning and Placement Center

In the [Career Planning and Placement Center](#), Assistant Director [Ellen Anderson](#) feels that it is very important to measure the outcomes and level of satisfaction of the office's work with students, alumni and employers. Specifically, the center focuses on doing follow-up evaluations for walk-in and appointment career counseling services, as well as for the workshops that the staff presents. In addition, evaluations are completed by students and employers attending job fairs and utilizing the Campus Recruiting Program. The methods for

conducting this assessment include direct evaluations as well as conducting surveys by email. Ellen indicates that the feedback received from evaluations has resulted in new topics for workshops, identifying effective methods to communicate with students, changes in the four job fairs the center sponsors each year, and other modifications in how programs and services are delivered.

As a service for students, the Career Planning and Placement Center is a unit of student affairs. The office's goals and accomplishments fit in

with the overall mission of student affairs. A part of their goals also relate to the Illinois Commitment to Higher Education agenda. In this way, the accomplishments of the center fit in with the larger goals of the university. "CPPC uses its assessment results to make adjustments to improve services," says Ellen, "and that's the real bottom line – review and use feedback to make things better for those we serve."

Contact Ellen for further information at [eanderson@niu.edu](mailto:eanderson@niu.edu) or check out their website at [www.stuaff.niu.edu/cppc](http://www.stuaff.niu.edu/cppc)

*Feedback received from evaluations has resulted in new topics for workshops and identifying effective methods to communicate with students.*

## FAQ:

## Large Enrollment Course Assessment

Q: I teach a large lecture class that typically has an enrollment of more than 200. How can I assess the students' overall growth without drowning in paperwork and statistics?

A: One assessment method that is often used in a large class is the **pre-test post-test method**. In this model, a pretest is

given the first day of class, establishing the students' baseline knowledge on specific learning objectives

and information that will be presented during the course. The same exam is given as the final. Exam

results can then be compared on an item by item basis to show student growth/mastery of

knowledge. Results are most useful when they are reviewed in aggregate form.

Another option is to use **course embedded assessment** (CEA). One CEA method is to embed identical test items in examinations across multiple sections of a course. For additional information on this type of assessment measure, see the article on CEA in this issue of *Toolkit*.



## Artifact Selection for Portfolios

A portfolio, in assessment terms, is a purposeful collection of student works that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas of the curriculum. A successful portfolio includes the following:

- *Student participation in selecting contents* – allowing the student to self-select is an excellent way to have the student actively participate in the learning

process.

- *Clear criteria for content/item (artifact) selection* – what does the student need to demonstrate?
- *Stated, clear criteria for judging merits (rubric, checklist)* – how will the student's work be reviewed/judged?
- *Evidence of a student's self-reflection* – what has the student learned as a result of the exercise or curriculum?

Let's examine "clear criteria for content/item

(artifact) selection" – what does the student need to demonstrate?

Here are some examples that can be used to help in artifact selection.

**Work completed** – best work, range of work, satisfying or unsatisfying work.

**Knowledge of (samples from) each major genre or problem**

**type.** In an English course, for example, the student might be asked to include a poem, a short story, and a research paper.

**Work displaying progress** – Again using an English course as an example, a work selected from early course assignments, mid-course assignments, and a final project would show growth in student writing abilities.

**Evidence of insight** – samples of student work that indicate or demonstrate understanding of core concepts, questions, and themes (ex: appropriate format for presentation of a research paper).

**Reflection** – asking the student to explain why they selected a particular artifact and/or what they learned in the process of preparing the artifact.

Portfolios containing these types of materials can enhance the assessment process by revealing a range of skills and understandings on the part of the student; supporting instructional goals; reflecting change and growth over a period of time; and encouraging student reflection.

Special Feature

### Assessment in Sixty Seconds



[Better quality](#)



[Faster transmission](#)

Click either link, above, to hear Dr. Promod Vohra's assessment philosophy. Windows Media Player is necessary to view this file. Download [Windows Media Player](#) for free.

## Course Embedded Assessment

*Course embedded assessment* (CEA) differs from outcomes assessment in that it occurs throughout the course or unit taught. Its primary purpose is to chart progress, rather than to act as a measure of which student learning objectives have been mastered. Another term for this type of measure is “formative assessment.”

There are a wide variety of CEA methods. One option is to review results of student responses to common examination questions across sections of a course (items embedded in

exams), a technique that can be used successfully in large, multi-section courses. For other types of student work (including essays, research papers, case study reports, and oral presentations), rubrics, checklists and rating scales can be used to evaluate student performance in applicable knowledge/skills areas. Results can then be reviewed across various sections of the same course and can be compared in aggregate.

Advantages of using CEA include:

- CEA is an integral part of the work a student does

in a course.

- CEA items do count as part of a grade and provide meaningful feedback to students and faculty.
- CEA tasks can be scored with a rubric based on clear and explicit criteria.
- CEA tasks are *not* an exit exam or a standardized competency test.
- CEA tasks are *not* used to evaluate a professor or an individual classroom.

Give it a try! For more help in this area contact the [Office of Assessment Services](#).

### BEYOND CONFUSION

## An Assessment Glossary

*This feature is the fifth in a series designed to clarify common assessment terminology.*

### **Embedded Assessment—**

A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process. Often used for assessment purposes classroom assignments that are evaluated to assign students a grade. Can

assess individual student performance or aggregate the information to provide information about the course or program; can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative. Example: as part of a course, expecting each senior to complete a research paper that is graded for content and style, but is also assessed for advanced ability to locate and evaluate Web-

based information (as part of a college-wide outcome to demonstrate information literacy).

— Dr. Andrea Leskes, Vice President for Education and Quality Initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

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