FAQ

What Are Assessment Updates, and How Are They Used?

A number of questions regarding NIU Annual Updates come up frequently including: What are Annual Updates? Why does my program have to do Annual Updates? Do we have to complete them in the summer? How are they used?

What are Annual Updates? First piloted in 2004, Annual Updates must be completed for each academic program at NIU by the end of May every year. Forms are online at the Office of Assessment Services (OAS) website, and a completed sample is also available. Departments are required to report on two distinct assessment methods; list the student learning outcomes the methods are intended to assess; provide data findings from each of the assessment methods implemented; and most importantly, describe the use of these data findings in making programmatic changes for increased student learning.

Why does my program have to do Annual Updates? Every academic program on campus is required to complete Annual Updates to 1) promote and 2) ensure good assessment practices across campus. The Annual Update assessment mechanism promotes ongoing monitoring of student learning outcomes, and assessment of those outcomes, at the programmatic level by providing an annual review and means for discussion of student learning among program faculty. By completing the Annual Update, the program has an opportunity for its faculty to engage in a critique of student learning through a review of just two methods for assessing that learning. This periodic review allows for small and large changes, as needed, in program curriculum. It also keeps student learning “off the back burner” between major program reviews.

Continued
**Huskies Lead the Pack!**

Continuing a trend of several years, Northern Illinois University faculty and staff are leading the way with top quality presentations at premiere assessment conferences in 2008. Office of Institutional Research Director Dan House and Office of the Provost Research Associate Donna Askins will present “An Assessment of Entering College Characteristics of Students with Disabilities and Non-Disabled Students” at the IUPUI Assessment Institute. The Institute is the nation’s oldest and largest assessment conference and, as shown below, there is still time to register.

In addition, at NASPA’s International Assessment & Retention Conference in June, NIU was represented by Brandi Hephner LaBanc, Amy Franklin, and Donna Schoenfeld from the Division of Student Affairs, and Lucy Robinson from Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Sciences.

Other recent NIU presentations have included:

- An Assessment of Student and Institutional Factors Associated With Retention Outcomes: The Development of an Assessment Strategy and Initial Results (outcomes of surveys of non-returning students)
- An Assessment of Relationships Between First-Year Experiences and Student Growth and Achievement: An Application of the Your First College Year (YFCY) Survey
- Toolkit: The Nuts and Bolts Newsletter from Assessment Services

**The 2008 Assessment Institute**

Indianapolis, Indiana
Pre-Institute Workshops: October 26, 2008
Institute Dates: October 27-28, 2008
The registration deadline for the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis is October 3, 2008.

The National Conference on First-Year Assessment provides a comprehensive introduction to the theory and practice of first-year assessment. It is designed to maximize opportunities for participant networking and is structured to create a cumulative learning experience.

**Don’t Miss**

**National Conference on First-Year Assessment**
San Antonio, Texas, October 12-14, 2008

The 6th Annual SC Formative Assessment Conference
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, November 8 - November 11, 2008

This national conference provides a forum for a broad spectrum of educators to discuss formative assessment and methods of using the results to inform and guide instructional practices in the classroom. Those who strive for effective pedagogy will find this a rewarding convention.
Rubrics You Can Use: Teamwork

At this summer’s NASPA International Assessment and Retention Conference, Dr. Rebecca Sanderson of Oregon State University pointed out that several rubrics for commonly used concepts and skills are available on the internet. This example, which measures teamwork, is one of many free rubrics available at [www.teach-nology.com/rubrics](http://www.teach-nology.com/rubrics).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students offer assistance to each other.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students work from each others’ ideas.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student contributes to the project.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students exchange, defend, and think about ideas.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students interact, discuss, and pose questions to all members of the team.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader observed the students encouraging and supporting the ideas and efforts of others.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader observed the students offering ideas and reporting their findings to each other.</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upwards of 100 conference handouts, from 2007 and 2008, are posted online. There are discussions of how to assess diversity, reflective judgment, and students’ use of technology. Other topics covered include predicting student attrition rates and looking at trends in student financial aid.
The NIU Methods Matrix

Do you ever wonder where you can get more information on who is using specific assessment tools on campus? Who is using exit surveys? Capstone courses and projects? Course-embedded skills tests? Wouldn’t it be helpful if you could easily identify one or more academic programs on campus that are already using these tools to have a discussion with their faculty? It might save you the time of coming up with instruments from scratch or from making some of the implementation mistakes that others have already made before you.

The Office of Assessment Services (OAS) has posted a new tool on their website that can help you in this endeavor. The NIU Methods Matrix allows you to look up by program or method specific assessments that are being used by academic programs as of their last reporting to the OAS (generally from Annual Updates or from Assessment Status Reports). The Methods Matrix is currently posted as an Excel file which can be downloaded and is user-friendly. Methods are divided into direct and indirect assessments and listed in alphabetical order. Academic programs are divided by colleges and also listed in alphabetical order for ease of use.

Besides sharing assessment techniques, the Methods Matrix is intended to increase the transparency of assessment on the NIU campus. As always, the OAS is available for additional assistance in designing assessments and helping you to locate good assessment examples. Email the OAS or call (815) 753-8659.
SPECIAL GUEST

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12: Linda Suskie Presents

Linda Suskie, Vice President with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and author of *Assessing Student Learning: a Common Sense Guide*, will be on the NIU campus on Friday, September 12, 2008. Ms. Suskie will be offering two sessions for faculty and staff. The first, “Accountability Pressures and Their Impact on Regional Accreditation,” held from 8:00 to 10:15 a.m., will review sources of the recent increase in pressures for accountability, what higher education’s publics are asking for, and how the higher education community might respond.

The second, a hands-on workshop entitled, “Understanding and Using Assessment Results,” held from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., will focus on (1) the characteristics of “good” assessments that meet accreditors’ expectations, (2) identifying the decisions that an assessment should inform, (3) identifying benchmarks for interpreting assessment results, (4) tips on sharing results meaningfully, and (5) using results to improve teaching and learning. Small group exercises will be intermingled with short presentations on each of these topics.

Both presentations will be in the Capitol Room of the Holmes Student Center. Faculty and staff can register for either or both sessions at [www.facdev.niu.edu](http://www.facdev.niu.edu), by calling (815) 753-0595, or by writing to facdev@niu.edu. When registering, please include your name (as it should appear on the certificate), title, department, phone, email and special accommodations needed. Space is limited, so register now.

DID YOU KNOW?

Assessment Findings Improve Orientation

The first goal of Orientation and First Year Experience is “To provide high quality programs to educate and meet the needs of new students and their family members/guests in a welcoming environment which promotes student engagement within the community.” A student and family member orientation survey was utilized to measure the extent to which the goal was achieved.

As a result of feedback from the surveys, Orientation and First Year Experience modified the closing presentation to be more engaging and interactive. Survey results also helped guide the content of family break-out seminars; for example, a seminar sponsored by the Counseling and Student Development Center on first-year experience was replaced with a session for family members of commuting and non-traditional students. The Center’s original content was folded into a different large-group presentation.

A major change resulting from student evaluations was the way in which students are taught about the course registration process. Rather than a large lecture format, freshman students meet in a computer lab in smaller groups for a hands-on demonstration of the system, resulting in a greater comfort and familiarity when they navigate the process for the first time.
Assessment Updates, continued

The Annual Update assessments also ensure good assessment practice by documenting the outcomes of student learning and associated programmatic changes for all academic programs across campus. This transparency is an important aspect of external accreditation and accountability.

Do we have to complete them in the summer?
No. Although the Annual Updates are due no later than the last day of May every year, they may be completed at any time throughout the year. Data may be used from up to three different semesters to complete the forms. For example, for the Annual Updates due May 30, 2009, data may be used from Spring 2008, Fall 2008, or Spring 2009. If faculty members engage in a discussion of assessment in Fall 2008, they may want to incorporate data from Spring 2008 both in this discussion and in their 2009 Annual Update. The OAS will accept Annual Updates at any time of the year although they are analyzed and feedback given in the late summer and early fall months.

How are they used?
First and foremost, it is hoped that they will be used by faculty for program improvement in student learning. The OAS provides comprehensive feedback on each of the Annual Updates each year, offering suggestions for improvement in the basic components of the assessment cycle. In addition, the OAS analyzes trends in assessment practices across campus including completion of all phases of the assessment cycle, uses of specific types of assessment methods, and compliance with the Annual Update process. The Annual Updates are also reviewed for outstanding assessment practices and passed on to the University Assessment Panel for their consideration of awards to be given at the NIU Annual Assessment Expo.

Meet Sonja Herrington

Toolkit readers as well as the NIU community will recall that Sally Wakefield, who was in charge of assessment at the College of Business, retired in December of 2007. The College is pleased to welcome Sonja Herrington, twice a graduate of NIU (B.S., 2001; M.B.A., 2006), to assume responsibilities for conducting assessment at the college level.

Sonja supported a variety of assessment activities during her time at the Departments of Foreign Language and Literature as well as Psychology. At the College, she is working with Associate Dean Paul Prabhakar to ensure that business students’ learning goals are met, and to develop ongoing improvements to the college’s approach to assessment.

Besides being committed to student learning, Sonja states, “We want to make sure that assessment is faculty driven. To do this, we share assessment results with curricular committees at both the college and departmental levels. Faculty can then make suggestions for curricular improvement where needed.”

Sonja is also in charge of managing the College’s accreditation activities in accordance with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The next site visit is October 19-21 of this year. Toolkit sends best wishes for an excellent review!
Special Opportunities

- Friday, September 12, 8:00 a.m. to 10:15: “Accountability Pressures and Their Impact on Regional Accreditation.” Presented by special guest Linda Suskie in the HSC Capitol Room. Register online or call the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center at 753-0595.

- Friday, September 12, 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m: “Understanding and Using Assessment Results.” Presented by special guest Linda Suskie in the HSC Capitol Room. Register online or call the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center at 753-0595.

- The 2009 Assessment Expo has been scheduled for February 20, 2009 and will be held in the HSC Sky Room from 8:00 am to noon.
- Assessment expert Susan Hatfield will offer a workshop on campus on March 20, 2009 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the HSC Sky Room.

University Assessment Panel Meetings
Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to noon in Altgeld 203:
- September 19, 2008
- October 3, 2008
- October 17, 2008
- November 7, 2008
- November 21, 2008
- December 5, 2008

Join the Campus Assessment Network
The Campus Assessment Network is a growing group of assessment professionals and other interested parties across NIU working together to better 1) communicate and network on assessment issues; 2) share information and assessment tools; and 3) develop a shared assessment culture. Information about the network and upcoming meetings can be viewed at the Office of Assessment Services (OAS) website or by contacting the OAS at 753-8659. The next Network meeting will be held on October 10 from 1:30 to 3:30 in Campus Life Bldg., Room 115.