Northern Illinois University offers multiple resources for understanding and conducting assessment, gathering data, utilizing findings, consulting with colleagues, funding assessment projects, preparing for program or accreditation review, and more.

One place to start is the Office of Assessment Services (OAS). The recently published online assessment manual describes best practices, implementation methodology, and more. Data are available from alumni surveys, from one year, five years, and nine years after graduation.

The University Writing Project, an in-house assessment of student writing, utilizes course-embedded assignments to assess both early and late stage student writing skills. The program is structured in such a way that no extra time is required of students or faculty; writing samples are obtained from work already required, and scored by faculty from the English department.

Stipends are available for capstone course development. On an annual basis, any given degree program may submit one proposal. The selection process is competitive.

Annual Updates help academic programs track progress on the implementation of their assessment plans. Overall results are posted online.

For those interested in seeing who is using what assessment methods on campus, the methods matrix displays forty different ways to determine what students know and know how to do. This downloadable file is posted in an easy-to-use Excel format.

ASSESSMENT FAQ:

What Assessment Resources Does NIU Offer?

Northern Illinois University Joins Voluntary System of Accountability

Office of Assessment Services Welcomes New Staff

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TOOLKIT ARCHIVES

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What Assessment Resources does NIU Offer?

Call for Participants Your Input
Campus Assessment Network Message

The Campus Assessment Network, established in 2006, brings together assessment professionals and other interested parties across NIU with the following goals in mind:

- Communicate and network with one another on assessment issues.
- Share information and assessment tools to increase effectiveness in assessment practices.
- Promote assessment as an integral part of student success on the NIU campus.

With regard to the last, the Network is specifically targeting four major campus constituents: students, faculty and staff, administrators, and community partners. Messages promoting assessment were developed, then carefully reviewed and agreed upon by the entire Network. The Network is broadcasting these messages in poster form to each of these four groups.

The images are available to download on the Office of Assessment Services website, and the Network encourages interested parties to freely reprint as needed. Questions may be directed to Carolinda Douglas, Campus Assessment Network chair.
TOOL OF THE MONTH

Assessing Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of a Biology Undergraduate

Buzz Hoagland, professor of biology at Westfield State College of Massachusetts, freely shares the rubrics he developed to assess his students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions. Excerpts from these rubrics are reprinted here with his permission.

Dr. Hoagland’s rubrics exemplify ways to gauge evidence of basic versus advanced student learning. For example, a student with a basic understanding of energy flow in ecosystems can describe energy pyramids. An advanced student would be able to site how humans are influencing energy flow.

Readers are encouraged to visit Dr. Hoagland’s website to view these rubrics in full. The site also features a rubric for assessment of student portfolios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Basic proficiency Evidence presented demonstrates</th>
<th>Proficient Evidence presented demonstrates basic proficiency AND demonstrates ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than basic proficiency: Note deficiencies</td>
<td>Evidence presented demonstrates</td>
<td>Evidence presented demonstrates basic proficiency AND demonstrates ability to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy conversions in organisms</td>
<td>pathways of anaerobic and oxidative metabolism and photosynthesis</td>
<td>biochemical mechanisms involved in these pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population genetics</td>
<td>knowledge of Hardy-Weinberg model, drift, migration, inbreeding, and mutation</td>
<td>how various population genetic models can be applied to current problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy flow in ecosystems</td>
<td>energy pyramids</td>
<td>how humans are influencing energy flow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Basic proficiency Evidence presented demonstrates</th>
<th>Proficient Evidence presented demonstrates basic proficiency AND demonstrates ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than basic proficiency: Note deficiencies</td>
<td>Evidence presented demonstrates</td>
<td>Evidence presented demonstrates basic proficiency AND demonstrates ability to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of basic laboratory techniques</td>
<td>perform standard lab techniques in molecular, cellular, organismal, and environmental biology</td>
<td>work independently on a research project within or outside of a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment of knowledge and learning skills</td>
<td>reflective essays within the context of a course</td>
<td>reflection for the portfolio that spans multiple courses and is subject based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispositions</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
<th>Acceptable, but needs work</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their motivation for studying biology</td>
<td>Missing statement</td>
<td>Statement is vague</td>
<td>Clearly stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of biological studies on the environment and human societies</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>Detailed analysis of a contemporary problem</td>
<td>Detailed analysis of a contemporary problem and an example of a student contribution beyond the college to the understanding of a contemporary problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Assessment Resources Does NIU Offer?

The OAS also co-hosts special events. Up to two assessment experts visit campus each year. Under the auspices of the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, these workshops are offered free of charge for NIU faculty and staff. The Annual Assessment Expo, offered in conjunction with the Campus Assessment Network and the University Assessment Panel, showcases ten best practices from among NIU faculty and staff.

Other internal organizations offer considerable assessment resources. The Campus Assessment Network is a group that shares ideas, offers informal feedback, and supports the culture of assessment on campus. All interested parties may join, whether or not they are formally responsible for assessment in their units.

Most people know that the University Assessment Panel provides oversight for assessment activities within the Division of Academic and Student Affairs. Less well known is the fact that some financial support is available for units to develop or improve their assessment projects or methodology.

All of the above resources are university-wide. In addition, many units have specific assessment offices or officers. Just a few of these are:

- **The Office of Assessment & Training in Student Affairs**
  (Director, Amy Franklin)
- Coordinator Carrie Zack in the Office of Teacher Certification
- **The College of Education Office of Assessment**
- Cassandra Simmons in the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology
- Beth Towell in the College of Business

For further information, contact OAS Director Carolinda Douglass, or your college office.

Click any file folder at left to visit that resource.
Office of Assessment Services Welcomes New Staff

A ten-year veteran of NIU, **Will Boelcke** holds a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics with an emphasis in probability and statistics, a Master of Science in Educational Research and Evaluation, and a certificate of graduate study in Advanced Quantitative Methodology in Education. Will’s professional experience includes work for the Center for Child Welfare and Education, and Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to use Technology (PT3).

**Amy Martin** holds two Master’s degrees in Social Psychology, one from Ball State University and the second from NIU. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Social Psychology and plans to graduate in 2010. This is Amy’s second graduate assistantship with OAS. This year, she will be working on the Alumni Survey, and a variety of data analysis projects.

**Barbara Johnson**, who will provide administrative support at OAS, has a background in both teaching and computer programming. More recently, she has worked as a field botanist, cataloging plants and monitoring vegetation in nature preserves and other natural areas throughout the Chicago region. She has copyedited a number of botanical publications and has served as the administrator of a nonprofit organization. For the past five years, she has also been a volunteer in the conservation lab at the Newberry Library, rebinding books and doing general book and map repair.

New to not only NIU but the state of Illinois all together, **Brian Lance** holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sport Management from the University of Michigan. He will begin his masters in Management Information Systems here at NIU this coming winter. Brian’s professional background centers on quantitative market research and marketing. To start out, his primary focus this year will be on the Alumni Survey and the University Assessment Panel for OAS.

The **Office of Assessment Services** is pleased to bring on board these top-notch personnel. Welcome!

**Assessment Video: Carrie Zack**

**Carrie Zack** has served as Teacher Certification Assessment Coordinator in the **University Office for Teacher Certification** since 2005. She assists faculty and staff with identifying, collecting and using assessment data related to student performance on professional and state standards. She also works on maintaining accreditation from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Carrie indicates: “I am proud to work in assessment because when done well, assessment is the key to continuous improvement.”

Click either photo at left to view a video clip of additional discussion about Carrie’s assessment viewpoint.
NIU Joins Voluntary System of Accountability

In the summer of 2009, Northern Illinois University joined over 300 institutions of higher education who are electing to participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). The VSA, a joint program of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the Association of Public And Land-Grant Universities (APLU), is designed to improve public understanding of how public colleges and universities operate.

This is accomplished through the College Portrait, a standardized web report which each school posts online.

According to the VSA, “The College Portrait provides consistent, comparable and transparent information on the characteristics of institutions and students, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and core educational outcomes. The information is intended for students, families, policy-makers, campus faculty and staff, the general public, and other higher education stakeholders.”

Participation in the VSA demonstrates that NIU has implemented a system of assessment and the results are published. Participation also helps the university meet some Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria.

The Portrait includes three standard sections of common data elements, described below. The complete Sample Template is online.

In addition, each institution is entitled personalize its Portrait by adding a series of up to nine institution-specific links. A special advisory group is working to determine what NIU will display. Contact Carolinda Douglass for further information.

Three Standard Sections of the College Portrait

Section I: Consumer Information
- Costs of attendance
- Degree offerings
- Living arrangements
- Student characteristics
- Graduation rates
- Transfer rates
- Post-graduate plans

Section II: Student Experiences and Perceptions
Results from one of four student engagement surveys which show:
- Group learning
- Active learning
- Experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas
- Student satisfaction
- Institution commitment to student learning and success
- Student interaction with faculty and staff
Also on this page:
- Links to other institutional evaluations of campus life

Section III: Student Learning Outcomes
- A description of how the institution evaluates student learning
- Links to institution-specific outcomes data such as program assessments and professional licensure exams

Results from one of three instruments (CAAP, CLA, or MAPP) designed to measure student learning gains in critical thinking (including analytic reasoning) and written communication:
- the learning gains between the freshman and senior years (or the value-added component);
- and the actual average test scores for freshmen and seniors.
Mark Your Calendar

On October 16, 2009, Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, executive director of the Office for Assessment and Quality Enhancement at Texas Christian University, visits NIU. Dr. Wehlburg will make two presentations.

The first is “Faculty Learning Groups - More Than Just Another Committee.” In this morning session, participants will explore the power of faculty learning groups (FLG) as a method for transforming teaching and learning using assessment processes. By exploring the FLG process, discussion will focus on what has worked in the past and what could work at NIU to enhance student learning. Small group conversation will highlight how FLGs can be used to create meaningful and sustainable methods for assessing learning and using that information to enhance the educational process.

The second session is entitled “Measurable Outcomes and Meaningful Measures.” At this time, the Mobius Strip will be used to demonstrate the interconnections between outcomes and measures as applied to NIU Baccalaureate Goals. Creating measurable outcomes might have been frustrating in the past, but when they are well-written, they can be used to enhance the assessment process in meaningful ways. Participants will gain information on how to write useful and measurable outcomes and how to identify existing authentic measures, as well as methods for creating new measures. This hands-on session will enable participants to modify or create new measurable outcomes and meaningful measures.

Questions about Dr. Wehlburg’s presentation may be directed to assess@niu.edu or 753-8659. Space is limited, so faculty and staff are encouraged to register in advance.

Call for Participants

The Office of Assessment Services invites faculty and staff to apply for a special project to help grow the culture of assessment at NIU. A small group will read and utilize Trudy Banta’s book “Building a Scholarship of Assessment.” Results will include a variety of assessment collaborations, publications, presentations and other activities.

Interested parties should contact Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services. The deadline to join is October 1, 2009. Questions may be directed to assess@niu.edu or 753-8659.

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services:
Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief
Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services
and the Office of Assessment Services staff.

Your Input is Welcome

What assessment methods have worked well for you? What findings have helped you modify your program? Toolkit would love to print your assessment tips or success story! We’re looking to share the wisdom we each develop, making the work of assessment more productive. If you’d like material to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of Toolkit, submit a Word document of no more than 300 words as an email attachment to cdoug@niu.edu.