Module 1: Principles and Purposes of Assessment

Key Takeaways:

1. Colleges and universities are increasingly required to be publicly accountable for the learning outcomes of their students.

2. Assessment is aimed at improving student learning – understanding what students have learned, using evidence to measure students' learning against clearly-defined goals, and using the assessment results to continuously improve the teaching/learning process.

3. Assessment data is obtained through a systematic and intentional process that yields measurable outcomes of student learning related to specific learning goals. Such data should provide valid and useful information about whether expected student learning goals are being met.

4. Effective assessment includes four steps, focused on both improvement and accountability:
   a. Establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning
   b. Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes
   c. Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations, and
   d. Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning

5. Good assessment:
   - identifies clear and important student learning goals
   - is used by the university for continuous improvement
   - is valued by all participants
   - produces reasonably accurate and truthful results
   - effectively balances costs and benefits

6. Alignment of student learning outcomes across multiple levels of the university leads to university-wide expectations about student learning and provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate these outcomes.

Application Questions:

1. What role does assessment of student learning outcomes play in my responsibilities as a faculty member? What role does assessment play in my department in clarifying student learning expectations and informing continuous improvement of teaching and learning?

2. Apply the four-step assessment cycle to a course that you are teaching or will likely be teaching in the future. What student learning outcomes are reasonable? What kinds of activities will provide students with opportunities to achieve those outcomes? How would I assess those outcomes? How would I use the resulting assessment data to improve my teaching and students' learning? How are my course-level student learning outcomes connected to departmental or university-level student learning goals?

3. What kind of course-level assessment activities could provide data useful for improving my teaching practices? How can I use course-level assessment results to continuously improve the learning of my students?

4. How does assessment of student learning in my course contribute to an understanding of broader student learning outcomes at the program or institution level?