

# Module 2: Designing Effective Assessment

## Key Takeaways:

1. **FOCUS AT THE PROGRAM LEVEL.** Developing program goals, assessing program outcomes and planning for the future requires faculty conversation about and commitment to a greater entity: the program and the program major, rather than individualized focus on specific courses. Assessment is meant to document systematically what students have learned [or not] from majoring in the academic degree program.
2. **ASSESSMENT SHOULD BE DRIVEN BY THE FACULTY.** It is important that all program faculty members assume the responsibility for designing and carrying out the assessment process. Assessment requires program faculty to think deeply about issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and student learning environments within the context of their academic disciplines.
3. **LEARNING GOALS SHOULD BE CRITERION-REFERENCED.** Student learning goals need to be clearly linked to the literature on professional competencies in the disciplinary field. Programs can write their own program goals from scratch or can search for appropriate goals from sources in the disciplines or supporting accreditation agencies.
4. **LEARNING SHOULD FOCUS ON COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT.** Faculty must employ concepts of cognitive, psychomotor, or affective development in drafting student learning goals or outcomes. The level of knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes expected of a student in a degree program will be conveyed by the verbs faculty select when writing learning goals. The number of program learning goals should be kept about five to seven in total, unless the program is required by an accreditation agency to have more. One useful device is the SMART concept for evaluating student learning goals; goals should be specific, measurable, achievable [but challenging], results-oriented, and timely.
5. **ASSESSMENT SHOULD ADHERE TO GOOD RESEARCH PRACTICE.** Assessment activities function much like the research data collection methods that researchers use to gather data for their qualitative and quantitative studies. Assessment measurement requires faculty be conscious of reliability and validity at all times. The types of preferred assessment activities vary across disciplines and can include: testing, writing papers or reflective essays, conducting applied or basic research projects, demonstrating physical skills, and making formal presentations to media or live audiences. Existing course assignments and activities can be used for collecting assessment data if program faculty review them and see a clear conceptual link to the program learning goal.

## Application Questions

1. How have I and the rest of the program faculty guided the assessment process in our department? Have we documented when and where we have met to discuss program learning objectives and assessment plans? Have we identified all stakeholders and asked for input from them during assessment planning?
2. Have I applied the SMART principles in designing student learning goals and outcomes?
3. Are my learning goals and outcomes clearly linked to the literature on professional competencies in the disciplinary field.
4. Have I approached the collection of assessment data from a systematic point of view using good research practices?
5. Are the methods I am using to collect assessment the right ones for the field and the competency I am trying to assess?

