

# CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

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## Assessment and the Health Professions

Recently there has been increasing emphasis on how to assess student learning outcomes in higher education. Although various assessments have been present for years, many colleges are struggling with the implementation of assessment outcomes into their programs. Health professions faculty have a long history of assessing students, often exemplified by a certification or licensure examination, which can be viewed as the ultimate student learning outcome assessment.

Most health professions programs are subject to specialized accreditation by a commission that is unique to their profession. Professional accrediting agencies assess the extent to which programs achieve their stated mission, goals, and expected outcomes through defined standards. These specialized accrediting commissions have a clear and direct impact on health professions programs. Accreditation by these professional agencies represents the highest standard of achievement. It provides evidence of the educational quality of the program and continuous improvement through a rigorous and comprehensive peer review.

Linking student learning outcomes to health professions programs is not new. These programs must regularly assess student learning outcomes throughout their curriculum as part of their specialized accreditation requirements. These assessments focus on whether the student has achieved the competencies necessary to advance professionally, and assist the students in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values considered important at their stage of learning. Student learning outcomes provide the framework and instructional development for the various health professions curriculums.

In the academic setting, most student learning outcome assessment models incorporate active learning through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Faculty in the health professions recognize that the process of assessment in the clinic has many similarities to the process of assessment in the classroom. Students in the clinic make connections between expectations and specific skill sets needed after the learning has occurred. Clinical experiences also provide opportunities for students to obtain the necessary practice needed to develop a wide range of skills and to maintain professional expertise. These experiences support student learning outcomes and program outcomes.

In the clinical setting, outcomes are considered part of professional life. Clinical outcomes assessment is the foundation for an evidence-based practice. Evidence-based practice promotes lifelong learning and critical thinking and ensures optimum patient care. Since learning outcomes assessment will continue to drive health professions education, it should be used to help faculty develop meaningful and relevant evidence to guide their teaching.

## The Difference between Assessment and Evaluation

Finding out how well students have learned is an important part of teaching. While the information can be important for assigning grades, information about student learning can be used for other purposes. In doing so, it is important to understand the difference between assessment and evaluation.

Both assessment and evaluation can focus on teaching and learning. They can both occur on a small scale (e.g. course level) or a large scale (e.g. program level). Assessment and evaluation differ from each other in purpose as can be seen in the following two definitions.

Assessment can be defined as: A set of processes designed to improve, demonstrate, and inquire about student learning. Source: Palomba, C. A., and Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Evaluation can be defined as: The systematic process of determining the merit, value, and worth of a program, policy, procedure, or process. Source: Evaluation Glossary, Western Michigan University, the Evaluation Center.

Assessment and evaluation not only differ in their purposes, but, also, in their use of information. While it is possible to use the same tools for two approaches, the use of the data collected differs. For example, an instructor can use the results of a midterm exam for both assessment and evaluation purposes. The results can be used to review with the students course material related to common mistakes on the exam (i.e. to improve student learning as in assessment) or to decide what letter grade to give each student (i.e. to judge student achievement in the course as in evaluation).

Source: Purdue University's Center for Instructional Excellence website, <http://www.purdue.edu/cie>

*In God we  
trust.  
Everyone  
else needs  
data.*

### Assessment Tip:

Don't be concerned that outcomes assessment is assessing your instruction. This is not the goal of what student learning outcomes assessment is all about. The purpose for measuring learning outcomes is twofold- to improve student learning and to improve instruction.

## Leap Essential Learning Outcomes

In 2007, the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) issued a report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, which examined, among other ideas, economic, global, and cross-cultural changes. With input from educators and employers, the report also determined what college students need to know and be able to do in the 21st century. The result of this work was the establishment of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes as a framework for excellence. As mentioned in the report, the Council advocated "an education that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges" (Excerpt from *College Learning for the New Global Century*).

The Bergen Faculty Senate adopted the LEAP Outcomes as part of our General Education requirements in spring 2013. Each year, the General Education Committee identifies one - four outcomes to assess. The results of these assessments have enabled the committee to share the strengths of our General Education program with the college community and to address some of the weaknesses. This work is also enabling the College to better prepare our students for 21st century employer needs and global challenges.

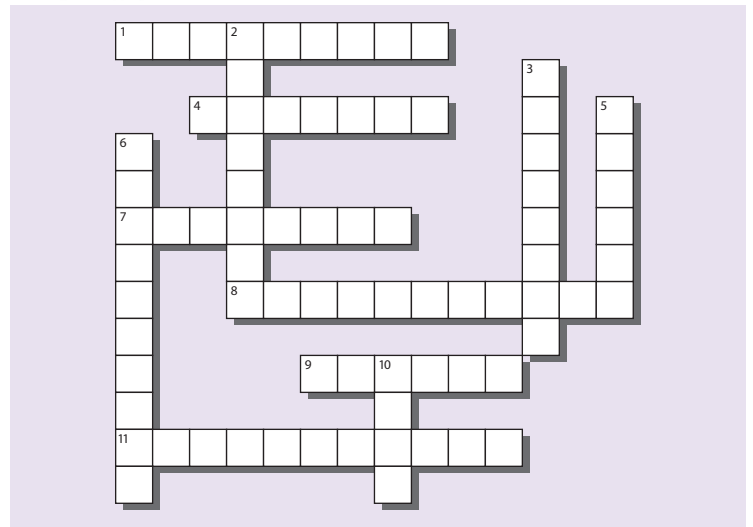
Excerpt from *College Learning for the New Global Century*, <https://secure.aacu.org/AACU/PubExcerpts/LEAPRPT.html>

## General Education and Assessment

In spring 2013, a faculty-initiated study of the effectiveness of Bergen Community College's General Education program of study launched. This undertaking sought to assess student abilities across the College by focusing on achievement in general education. This project was specifically focused on evidence of students' oral and written communication as well as critical and creative thinking skills. To this end, faculty across the curriculum responded to our call for artifacts and we selected assignments from students nearing completion of their degrees (those with at least 45 credits).

On a macro level of analysis, findings have given us pause to ponder what we as instructors do and how we may impact student success. They also afford us opportunities to examine approaches to instruction more systematically, including from the students' perspective. But possibly one of the most far reaching outcomes of this faculty-driven initiative is an emerging culture of assessment. Our faculty has always been concerned about student learning. But the number of conversations among faculty across disciplines, departments and programs on this issue is growing. Informal chats are evolving into shared ideas and interests in activities across the curriculum. There is more talk about the comparative value and drawbacks of rubrics, essays and multiple choice quizzes as assessments of student learning. Significantly, there are conversations about what is meant by "general education."

As we continue this research, we are heartened that not only do we address issues of what and how our students learn; we are raising questions about the goals and meaning of general education as well.



### ACROSS

1. Student performance standard
4. A holistic vision of the values and philosophy of a unit or institution
7. Students' personal records of learning and developing ideas
8. Ongoing process to understand and improve student learning
9. The point of scale that divides a group into two equal subgroups
11. Process used to judge quality of a program

### DOWN

2. Performance descriptors that indicate how well students will meet expectations
3. A culminating activity, performance or product that can be measured
5. A group whose progress is followed by means of measurements at different times
6. Statements that describe measurable expectations in a given educational program
10. Evidence used in assessment procedures

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