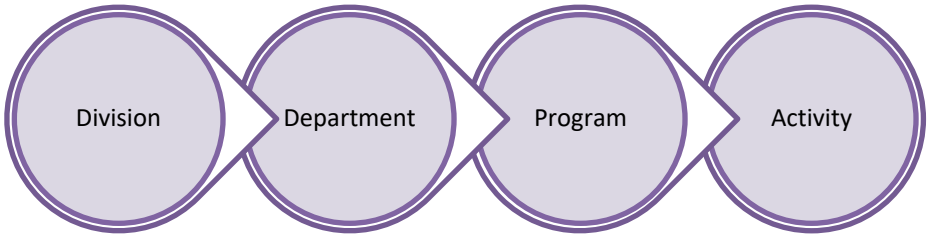
Texas Christian University
Student Affairs Assessment Guide

Chapter 4: Assessment Methods

Successfully undertaking assessment in student affairs has three essential stages – planning, implementing, and improving & sustaining the process (Banta & Palomba, 2015).

During the planning phase, one important consideration is the level of assessment to be conducted. The level of the assessment will influence the methods used during the implementation phase.



Once outcomes are determined, the next step is to decide what methods will be utilized in order to get the desired type of results. Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie (2000) put forth several questions that will help guide the assessment process:

- What are the issues at hand?
- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- Who should be studied?
- What is the preferred assessment method?
- How should data be collected?
- What instrument should be used?
- How should data be analyzed?
- How should the results be reported?
- How can data be used for improvement?

Purpose & Rationale

When thinking about the purpose of and rational for the assessment project, there are a few key considerations. First, the background and history of the program should be taken into consideration. This includes knowing the mission, key activities, and outcomes – both short and long-term – of the program/activity/service under scrutiny. Another important consideration is the resources that will be allocated to the project. This includes personnel, budget, technology, time, etc. Also to be considered are the expectations for the assessment and the intended use of the assessment results. Developing a purpose statement can help alleviate many fears and answer many questions. Examples of purpose statements may be:

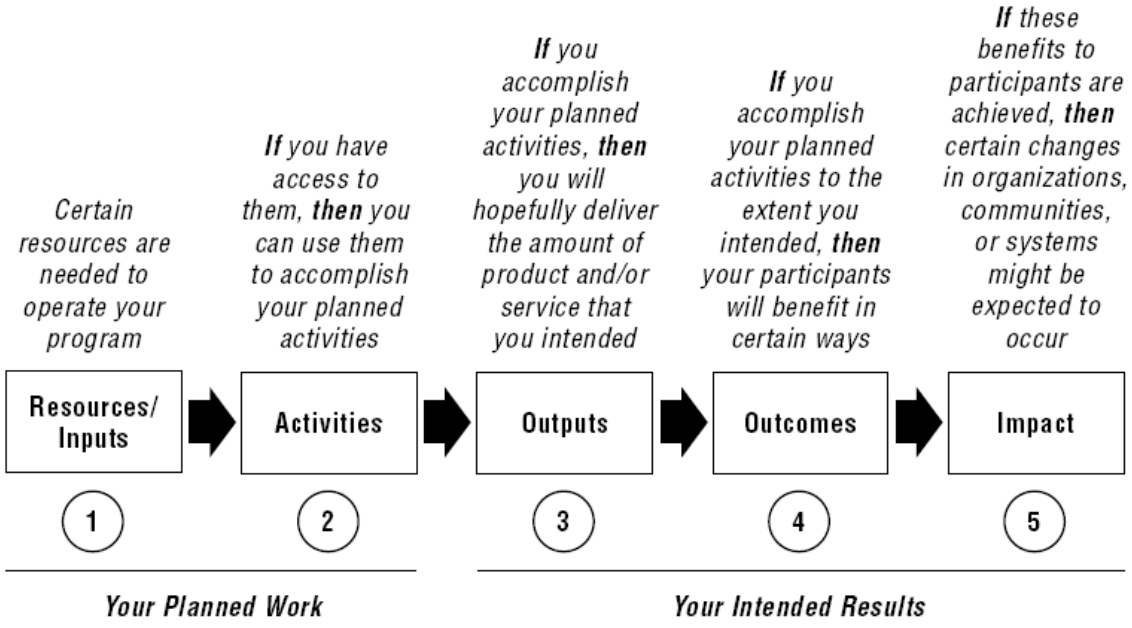
- Make decisions about program improvement
- Evaluate student learning
- Evaluate impact of program on campus climate
- Build support for resources
- Develop programs to satisfy identified needs

Involving Stakeholders

In education, the term *stakeholder* typically refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of an institution and its students, including Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. Stakeholders may also be collective entities, such as local businesses, organizations, advocacy groups, committees, media outlets, and cultural institutions, in addition to organizations that represent specific groups, such as alumni, parent-association, and faculty senate, to name a few. In a word, stakeholders have a "stake" in the institution and its students, meaning that they have personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern.

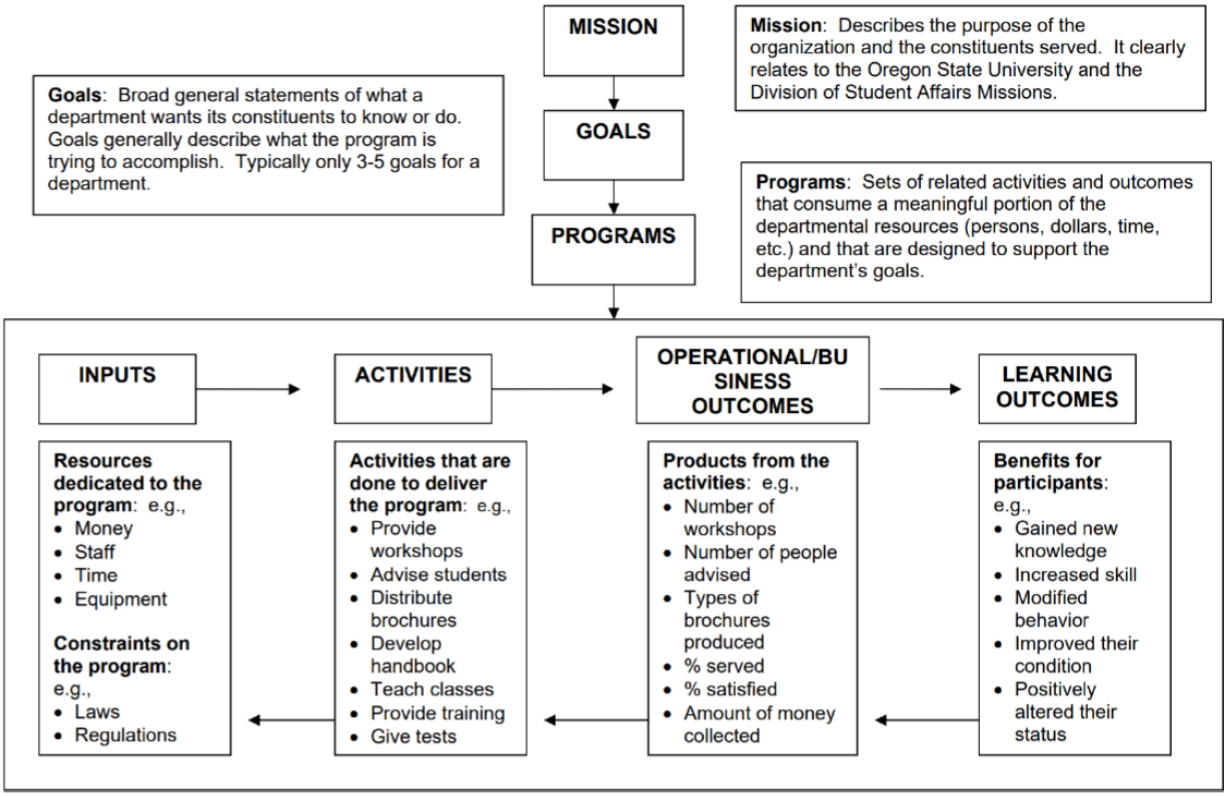
Logic Model

A logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate the program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve (Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Logic models help plan, implement, evaluate, and communicate more effectively about assessment efforts. Logic models come in a wide variety, from very complex to very rudimentary. The logic model below is a prime example of a very simple, straightforward model.

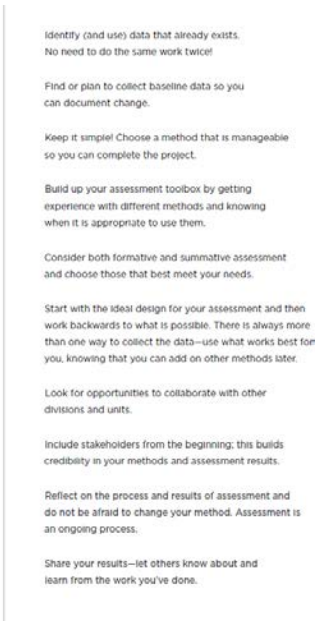


This model from Oregon State is a bit more complex.

Logic Model Template for Typical Student Affairs Department Programs



Bringing It All Together



Identify (and use) data that already exists.
No need to do the same work twice!

Find or plan to collect baseline data so you can document change.

Keep it simple! Choose a method that is manageable so you can complete the project.

Build up your assessment toolbox by getting experience with different methods and knowing when it is appropriate to use them.

Consider both formative and summative assessment and choose those that best meet your needs.

Start with the ideal design for your assessment and then work backwards to what is possible. There is always more than one way to collect the data—use what works best for you, knowing that you can add on other methods later.

Look for opportunities to collaborate with other divisions and units.

Include stakeholders from the beginning; this builds credibility in your methods and assessment results.

Reflect on the process and results of assessment and do not be afraid to change your method. Assessment is an ongoing process.

Share your results—let others know about and learn from the work you've done.

The worksheet, designed by CampusLabs, on the following page brings all of these elements together for a comprehensive assessment plan.

Assessment Planning

campuslabs Data Driven Innovation

Assessment Purpose

The purpose of this assessment is to _____ (PURPOSE)

by assessing _____ (POPULATION) using _____ (METHOD),

so I can _____ (USE OF RESULTS).

Success Criteria

What is your target?
How will you know if the goal or outcome is met?

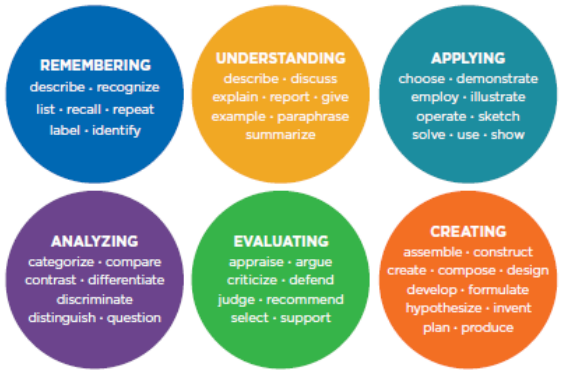
Students will be able to:

Additional Notes

Method Bank

Existing Data	Focus Groups	Visual Methods
Mobile Surveys	Interviews	Case Studies
Web Surveys	Portfolios	Document Analysis
Rubrics	Observations	Quick Assessments

Behavior words from Bloom's Taxonomy:



Project Timeline

Start Date — End Date

Methods of Gathering Information

After the determination of SLOs, perhaps the second most important step of the assessment process is choosing the appropriate methods and tools of assessing student learning. Potential methods take a wide variety of forms. One of the most important distinctions is that between direct versus indirect assessment methods. This difference was discussed in chapter 1. The next distinction is between quantitative versus qualitative methods of assessing. Examples of quantitative assessment include surveys, tracking data, institutional data; basically anything that involves numbers. Qualitative assessment, on the other hand, involves words. Examples of qualitative assessment include portfolio analysis, rubrics, focus groups, and case studies.

In the case of the assessment of student learning, primary emphasis is usually placed on direct methods, such as

- Evaluations
- Written assignments
- Oral presentations and performances
- Portfolios
- Capstone projects
- Reflection papers

Nevertheless, indirect methods can provide a useful supplement and check on the findings from direct measures. They include

- Surveys of students and alumni
- Exit surveys with graduating students
- Data on placement and other measures of post-graduation performance

The selection of assessment tools involves a tradeoff between the ability to obtain detailed information and the need to keep the process feasible and manageable. For this reason programs should use multiple assessment tools to overcome the disadvantages of a single tool.

The following table provides an overview of various tools and lists advantages and challenges of each type of instrument.

Method	Description	Purposes	Advantages	Challenges
Observation	Systematic observation using protocols, check-lists, ratings, and field notes	-Understand context, activities, people, and interactions. -Understand complex processes like teaching and learning. -"See" what people "say" and "do".	-View operations as they are occurring. -Adapt to events as they unfold.	-Can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors. -Can be complex to categorize observations. -Observer can influence behaviors. -Can be expensive and time-consuming.
Behavior tracking	Tracking student participation and actual actions.	-Understand actual students' behavioral patterns.	-Non-intrusive. Easy data gathering, once the system is set up.	-Setting up a recording mechanism may be difficult. Behaviors will not reveal reasons.
Focus Group	Group interaction directed and moderated by a facilitator.	-Gain insight into group perception and attitudes towards advising. -Identify and understand needs and expectations of a group.	-Can be an efficient way to get breadth and depth of information. -Can be used with wide range of topics, individuals, and settings. -Can be educational for students	-Training moderators and note takers, conducting sessions, and transcribing can be expensive and time-consuming. -Data analysis can be complex. -Results may not generalize across individuals.
Interview	Interactions with individuals to gather extended responses	-Gain insight into attitudes and perceptions. -Capture and describe complex processes like learning or teaching. -Elicit stakeholders' expectations and needs. -Elicit feedback from employers. -Understand learner experiences.	-Elicit full range and depth of info. -Develop relationship with interviewee. -Can be flexible, tailored to interviewee.	-Training interviewers, conducting interviews, and transcribing can be expensive and time-consuming. -Data analysis is complex -Results may not generalize -Interviewer can bias interviewee responses
Survey	Series of written questions administered to individuals	-Gain insight into attitudes and perceptions. -Elicit perceived achievement of outcomes, and usefulness or effectiveness of advising. -Understand "lay of the land" before diving deeper. -Identify trends over time.	-Can be completed anonymously. -Non-threatening -Inexpensive and easy to administer. -Easy to compare and analyze data. -Can be administered to large groups.	-Not suitable for collecting in-depth info. -Can't get the whole story. Impersonal. -Might not generate careful feedback. -Wording can bias respondents. -Requires careful writing and sampling. -Low response rates may be an issue.
Self-assessment	Open-ended or rating Qs that ask students to reflect on their learning & experience.	-Gain insight into the how, when, and why of learning. -Increase students' autonomy and develop deeper understanding of the subject matter.	-Can provide rich data. -Can offer an opportunity for meta-cognition.	-Requires explicit prompts and/or instructions. -Analysis can be time-consuming.
E-portfolio	Purposeful collection of student work samples that exhibit learning process and/or achievement.	-Gain understanding of students' learning process and culminating experience. -Assessment FOR learning: Students reflect and connect their in-class, out-of-class, and life experiences.→ Fosters life-long learning.	-Can be used to show learning gains over time. -Highlights students' strength via multiple student work samples.	-Time-consuming to rate and evaluate. -Clear expectations and guidelines required. -Students may require extensive support when developing and managing the portfolio.
Case Studies	Intense investigation of a program, class, individual using multiple methods	-Document what actually happened. -Track perceptions, attitudes, & behavior. -Understand individuals' needs & expectations.	-Fully depicts an individual's experience in a program, a class, etc. -Powerful means to portray the program to outsiders. Generate thorough understandings	-Time-consuming to collect, organize, describe, and analyze. -Represents depth of info rather than breadth.
Existing data	Institutional data (e.g., retention, enrollment) & campus-wide surveys	-Understand longitudinal student demographics and trends over time. -Compare to other units/cohorts	-Non-intrusive. Can benchmark your students' performance with peer programs. Allows longitudinal comparison.	-Gaining proficiency in extracting student data can be challenging.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge “thank you” to CampusLabs for providing much of the information in this guide. The Accreditation course provided a great framework and many of the resources in this text.