

# Implementing Outcomes-Based Assessment of Student Learning



Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.  
Assistant Vice President for Institutional Assessment  
Texas A&M University  
[mbresciani@tamu.edu](mailto:mbresciani@tamu.edu)  
979-458-2913





# Presentation Overview

---

- Components of An Assessment Plan Plan
- Reminders about Outcomes
- Choosing Means of Assessment
- Reminders About How to Get it Done
- Questions



# First Things First (Bresciani, et alia, 2006)

---

- Acknowledge why you are engaging in outcomes-based assessment
- Acknowledge your political environment
- Articulate a shared conceptual understanding
- Define assessment
- Define a common language
- Articulate your assessment expectation(s) and the use of the results

# The Assessment Cycle

## (EBDM)

(Bresciani, 2003)

- The key questions...
  - What are we trying to do and why? or
  - What is my program supposed to accomplish?
  - How well are we doing it?
  - How do we know?
  - How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
  - Do the improvements we make work?

# The Iterative Systematic EBDM Cycle

Adapted from  
Peggy Maki, Ph.D. by  
Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.





# Helpful Reminders, Cont. (Bresciani, et alia, 2006)

---

- Administrators must understand the purpose of assessment - - it is not assessment for assessment's sake
- Administrators must value what is being measured
- Administrators must have ownership of the process
- Be flexible - - Respect varying departments' autonomy

# Typical Components of An Assessment Plan and Report

- Mission
  - Description
  - Goals or Objectives
  - Outcomes or Objectives
  - Evaluation Methods
    - With criteria and by Outcomes
    - Add Limitations if necessary
  - Implementation of Assessment
    - Who is Responsible for What?
    - Timeline
  - Results
    - By Outcomes
  - Decisions and Recommendations
    - For each outcome and for the assessment process
  - Resources Needed

# Helpful Reminders (Bresciani, et alia, 2006)

- Clearly communicate assessment expectations
- Go ahead and write every program and learning outcome down but...
  - Don't try to assess every outcome every year.
- You may want to start with workshop outcomes and build program outcomes from those.
- You can start with institutional, division, or departmental outcomes and see each program or course ties to those.
- Then, move to implementing the entire assessment cycle one outcome at a time making everything for that systematic - - In other words, we want to begin to form “habits” of assessment.

# Suggestions to Promote the Process

(Bresciani, et alia, 2006)

- Be flexible
- Remind each other of the benefits of assessment
- Share examples with each other
- Celebrate assessment victories
- Advertise your assessment learnings and decisions made
- Nudge and Retreat (Maki, 2001) or Scratch and Sniff (Richardson, 1998)
- Incorporate students in all facets of assessment planning and implementation, if your program is ready
- Invite faculty into the learning outcomes conversations

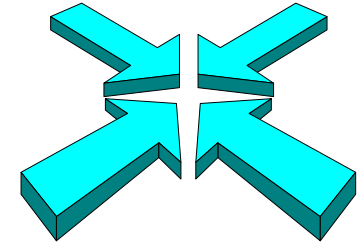


# Mission Statement

---

- “In just a few sentences, a mission statement needs to communicate the essence of your organization to your stakeholders and to the general public.” - Fund Raising Made Simple
- It can come from your strategic planning initiatives or from your Division, institution, or unit plan
- It can also come from your professional organization (e.g., ACUHO-I, ACU-I, CAS)

# Outcomes



- Outcomes are more detailed and specific statements derived from the goals.
- These are specifically about what you want the **end result** of your efforts to be. **It is not what you are going to do to the student**, but rather it describes how you want the student to demonstrate what he or she knows or can do.
- They use active verbs such as articulate, illustrate, conduct, synthesize, analyze, etc.



# Additional Assistance Constructing Learning Outcomes: Bloom's Taxonomy

---

- <http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/researchskills/dalton.htm>
- [http://www.kent.wednet.edu/KSD/MA/resources/blooms/teachers\\_blooms.html](http://www.kent.wednet.edu/KSD/MA/resources/blooms/teachers_blooms.html)
- <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/handouts/bloom.html>
- Terms: construct, locate, dissect, categorize, compose, invent.....



# Outcomes, Cont.

---

- Make a conscious decision to articulate outcomes that infer pre- and post-tests
- Make a conscious decision to be held responsible for behavior
- Remember that your outcomes may look different for your various constituents - - you may want to start with your more manageable population first, such as your Para-professionals



# Outcomes, Cont.

---

- Regardless of whether your goals are top down – the outcome is where you operationalize the goal. Therefore, the outcome or end result of the doing allows you to “personalize” the goal to your own program.



# Example Outcome

---

Students will demonstrate responsible leadership by organizing a successful event that their group's membership deems important and relevant to the residential community .



# Examples of Outcomes

---

1. Students will be able to compare and contrast various leadership styles.
2. Students will be able to identify when students are cheating.
3. Students will be able to locate all of the items they need for a balanced diet.
4. Students will demonstrate care when using the recreation center equipment.



# Other Example Outcomes

---

1. Resident advisors will apply conflict resolution skills in halls.
2. Resident advisors will facilitate the steps in decision making among residents who demonstrate an inability to make responsible choices.
3. Students that live in the residence halls will demonstrate an understanding of personal safety practices. (behavior?-do you really want to be responsible for behavior change??)

# Articulate your Outcomes:

Refine At Least  
One of Your  
Outcomes



# Questions to Ask Yourself About Outcomes

---

- Is it measurable/identifiable?
- Is it meaningful?
- Is it manageable?
- Who is the target audience of my outcome?
- Who would know if my outcome has been met?
- How will I know if it has been met?
- Will it provide me with evidence that will lead me to make a decision for continuous improvement?

After you have articulated  
your outcomes...

---

Make sure You have a program  
that can actually deliver the  
outcome

e.g., planning



# Before Choosing an Assessment Method...

- Think about what meeting the outcome looks like
  - Be sure to describe the end result of the outcome by using active verbs
  - This helps articulate the criteria for identifying when the outcome has been met
- Describe how your program is delivering the outcome
  - There may be clues in the delivery of the outcome that help you determine how to evaluate it



# Before Choosing an Assessment Method, Cont.

---

- Think about collecting data
  - from different sources to make more meaningful and informed decisions for continuous improvement (*e.g., surveys, observations, self-assessment*) and for triangulation of data
  - that you believe will be useful in answering the important questions you have raised
  - that will appeal to your primary constituents or to those with whom you are trying to influence

# Measurement Methods

(Palomba and Banta, 1999)

---

- Evidence of learning- basically two types
  - Direct-methods of collecting information that require the students to display their knowledge and skills
  - Indirect- methods that ask students or some one else to reflect on the student learning rather than to demonstrate it

# Another Way to Look at It (Ewell, 2003)

---

- There are **naturally occurring assessment techniques** (e.g. project-embedded assessment methods such as essays, observed behavior, student interactions, student debates)
- There are those **designed** as a means to evaluate (e.g., surveys)

# Some Methods That Provide Direct Evidence



- Student work samples
- Collections of student work (e.g. Portfolios)
- Capstone projects
- Project-embedded assessment
- Course-embedded assessment
- Observations of student behavior
- Internal juried review of student projects
- External evaluations of student performance
- Document analysis (e.g., meeting minutes, policies, handbooks)

Bresciani, M.J.

# Direct Evidence Cont.

from Peggy Maki, Ph.D.

- External juried review of student projects
- Externally reviewed internship
- Performance on a case study/problem
- Performance on problem and analysis (Student explains how he or she solved a problem)
- Performance on national licensure examinations
- Locally developed tests
- Standardized tests
- Pre-and post-tests
- Essay tests blind scored across units

# Some Methods That Provide Indirect Evidence

adapted from Peggy Maki, Ph.D.

- Alumni, Employer, Student Surveys
- Focus groups (depending on the interview protocol, this could be used as direct evidence)
- Exit Interviews with Graduates
- Graduate Follow-up Studies
- Percentage of students who go on to graduate school
- Retention and Transfer Studies
- Job Placement Statistics

# Indirect Evidence Cont.

---

- Faculty/Student ratios
- Percentage of students who study abroad
- Enrollment trends
- Percentage of students who graduate within five-six years
- Diversity of student body
- CAS Standards



# Choosing A Tool

---

- It is important to choose tools based on what you are trying to assess, not on what tool is most appealing to you
- Consider what will influence your constituents
- Consider what will provide you with information to make decisions
- Be able to justify your choice of tool and method



# Things to Consider When Choosing an Instrument

---

- What outcome(s) are you measuring?
- What criteria will determine if the outcome is met?
- Who is being assessed? How often do I have access to them? Do I know who they are?
- What is my budget?
- What is my timeline?
- What type of data is most meaningful to me: direct/indirect and qualitative/quantitative



# Things to Consider, Cont.

---

- Who will analyze the data and how?
- Who needs to see this data?
- How easily can I fit this method into my regular responsibilities? (every day, week, semester, year)
- Who needs to make decisions with this data?
- How will I document the evidence and the decisions made from that evidence?



# Example Outcomes Revisited

---

- Students will be able to articulate the steps of ethical decision making
- Students will be able to identify the challenges to making ethical choices (via case studies)
- Students will be able to evaluate their own choices and identify where they excelled in their own ethical decision making (via journals)



# Possible Assessment Tools

---

- Quiz
- Essay
- Journal
- Case Study
- Observation
- Peer Evaluation with criteria or rubric
- Professional Evaluation with criteria or rubric



Choose an Outcome and

---

Work through this Process

# Questions to Ask About Choosing a Measurement Tool

- How is this outcome delivered/implemented?
- What is my budget?
- What is my timeline?
- What are my analysis capabilities?
- Who needs to see this data?
- How easily can I fit this method into my annual responsibilities?
- Who needs to make decisions with this data?
- Will this kind of evidence help me make the decisions I need to make?
- How will I document the evidence and the decisions made from that evidence?



# Re-Casting Services

---

- In some cases, you may need to re-cast your services so that you can provide that which delivers the end result or provides the opportunities to assess student development and learning.
- Or you may just need to sit down and articulate the criteria that describes that which you want the student to demonstrate (i.e. What does problem solving look like?)



# Closing the EBDM Loop

---

- Briefly report methodology for each outcome
- Document where the students are meeting the intended outcome
- Document where they are not meeting the outcome
- Document decisions made to improve the program and assessment plan
- Refine assessment method and repeat process after proper time for implementation

# Other Items to Note and Report

- Unexpected/Unintended outcomes
- New data collection methods, including different times, student groupings (e.g., various ways you may separate the cohorts or groups of students to gather more meaningful data), and different methods
- Recommendations for other programs

# Other Items to Note and Report, Cont.

---

- Recommendations to repeat the assessment process prior to making any decisions
- Maintaining status quo
- Be sure to note the time when you will go back and re-assess



# What to Do with Your Mounds of Data?

---

- After you have articulated your outcomes, you can sift through the mounds of data more readily to determine what information can help you.
- Don't be surprised if you don't find any pre-existing data that will help you determine the effectiveness of your program.

# What to Do with Your Mounds of Data?, Cont.

- Most benchmark instruments help you identify where you are doing well and where you may have problems.
- That helps you prioritize your assessment work, but it may not help you with decisions for improving your program or for informing policy.



# What to Do with Bad Data?

---

- Report that you have inconclusive data.
- In your recommendations section, explain what you think may have gone wrong and what you will change next time.
- Be sure to include recommendations for refining outcomes, evaluation methods, criteria, and data analysis and interpretation methods.
- Can you make any recommendations for the program even though you have “bad” data?

# Suggestions to Aid The Process Continued (Bresciani, et alia, 2006)

- Articulate your assessment expectations
- Acknowledge and address barriers to assessment
- Pay attention to varying demands and resources
- Understand your role as an assessment committee member or as a director
- Answer the question, “What happens if I don’t engage in assessment?”

# Resources

- Each Other
- University Planning and Analysis (UPA) Assessment website
  - <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/>
- Undergraduate Assessment website  
[http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad\\_affairs/assessment/assess.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/assess.htm)
- Higher Learning Commission Website  
<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>



# Questions?

---





# One Minute Evaluation

---

- What is the most valuable lesson that you learned from this workshop?
- What is one question that you still have?
- What do you think is the next step that your division/program needs to take in order to implement systematic program assessment?

# References

- Bresciani, M.J. (September, 2002). *The relationship between outcomes, measurement. and decisions for continuous improvement.* National Association for Student Personnel Administrators, Inc NetResults E-Zine.  
<http://www.naspa.org/netresults/index.cfm>
- Bresciani, M.J., Zelna, C.L., and Anderson, J.A. (2004). *Techniques for Assessing Student Learning and Development in Academic and Student Support Services.* Washington D.C.:NASPA.
- Ewell, P. T. (2003). *Specific Roles of Assessment within this Larger Vision.* Presentation given at the Assessment Institute at IUPUI. Indiana University-Purdue University- Indianapolis.
- Maki, P. (2001). *Program review assessment.* Presentation to the Committee on Undergraduate Academic Review at NC State University.

# References, Cont.

- NC State University, Undergraduate Academic Program Review. (2001) Common Language for Assessment. Taken from the World Wide Web September 13, 2003:  
[http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic\\_programs/uapr/process/language.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_programs/uapr/process/language.html)
- Palomba, C.A. and Banta, T.W. (1999). Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing and improving assessment in Higher Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- University of Victoria, Counseling Services. (2003) Learning Skills Program: Blooms Taxonomy. Taken from the World Wide Web September 13, 2003:  
<http://www.Coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/bloom.html>