Assessment Methodology - Direct and Indirect Measures

Administrative Assessment

There are a variety of assessment strategies from which to choose. Keep in mind that each strategy has advantages and disadvantages. Because no measurement is perfect, we recommend the use of multiple measures in assessing any outcome. While indirect measures can provide valuable information, we recommend all administrative and units have at least one direct measure of meeting operational outcomes.

Indirect Measures

Indirect measures are typically reports or other non-performance-based indicators of outcome achievement. These may include survey results, focus groups, or recording of staff perceptions. Although indirect measures offer important information, indirect measures are not looked upon as favorably as direct measures. Indirect measures are most valuable when used in conjunction with direct measures.

Examples of indirect measures:

- Surveys of students, alums, or employers
- Focus groups of stakeholders, e.g. students, faculty, staff, community leaders
- Employee exit interviews
- An external review of the unit
- Staff professional development perceptions

Direct Measures

Direct measures require the evaluation of actual performance-based indicators. Documented results of increased space utilization, reductions in paper usage, or an increase in staff technology use could support an outcome seeking to increase efficiencies. Direct measures imply that there is an end-result or change that can be evaluated or measured.

Examples of direct measures:

- Decrease in wait time
- Increase in counts (e.g. number of customers served)
- Reductions in cost of performance
- Growth in service capacity

Academic Programs, Academic and Student Support Services, and Advising Assessment

Data collection methods for outcomes assessment is generally divided into two categories (i.e., direct and indirect measures). Degree programs and academic and student support services oftentimes use a combination of direct and indirect measures to assess outcomes. Note: *Indirect measures alone are insufficient in measuring student learning.* Best practices recommend the use of both direct and indirect measures in the assessment of outcomes, with more direct than indirect measures for academic programs.

Direct Measures

When defined within the context of **degree programs** and **academic and student support services**, direct assessment measures capture student's actual performance in a way that demonstrates specific learning has occurred. Direct assessment measures help to provide key insights into what students can do, which provides strong evidence of student learning. The strength of this measure lies in the fact that it requires students to produce work so that the extent to which learning expectations have been met can be evaluated.

Examples of Direct Measures of Student Learning:

- Portfolio evaluation
- Grading with scoring rubric
- Course-embedded tests, assignments/projects
- Culminating experiences: capstone projects, theses
- Employer's or internship supervisor's direct evaluation of students' performance
- Licensure exams
- Pre and post-test

Note: Grades alone do not usually provide meaningful information on exactly what students have and have not learned (Suskie, 2013). They represent student's overall competency and do not identify strengths and weaknesses on specific learning outcomes. As such, it makes it difficult to decide how to improve teaching and learning.

Indirect Assessment Measures

When defined within the context of **degree programs** and **academic and student services**, indirect assessment measures capture student's attitudes, perceptions, or feelings about their learning. This measurement type provides less concrete evidence of student learning but can be used in conjunction with direct measures to gain more insight into the impact of the teaching and learning process. Indirect measures also include data that is related to students, but not directly tied to an outcome (e.g., job placement rates, graduation rates, progression rates, etc.).

Examples of commonly used Indirect Measures of Student Learning:

- Alumni, employer, student engagement surveys
- Graduate exit surveys
- Departmental surveys
- Focus groups
- Curriculum/syllabus analysis