

Glossary of Planning & Assessment Terms

*Compiled from the following sources:
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Accreditation	The designation that an institution functions appropriately in higher education with respect to its purpose and resources. (Regional accrediting agencies accredit an entire institution. Professional accrediting agencies accredit professional programs.)
Administrative/Educational Support Unit	Any department of the institution that is not instruction but supports the educational and operational functions of the institution. (Also known as Non-Instructional or AES Unit.)
Assessment	The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs and educational support services undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.
Assessment Coordinator	The administrative position responsible for coordinating assessment activities for the College.
Assessment of Learning Outcomes	The "systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning"
Assessment Plan	The initial assessment document that describes the assessment strategy for a department or unit of the institution.
Assessment Report	The summary assessment document that records the decisions, actions or recommendations of a department or unit of the institution based upon the results or findings of that unit's assessment activity.
Benchmark	A description or example of institutional performance that serves as a standard of comparison for evaluation or judging quality.
Characteristics of Excellence	The MSCHE document that describes fourteen standards of institutional quality expected from accredited educational institutions and the minimum requirements for each known as "fundamental elements".
Competency	(1) Level at which performance is acceptable. (2) A group of characteristics, native or acquired, which indicate an individual's ability to acquire skills in a given area.
Confirmative Assessment	Assessment normally performed after the summative assessment has been complete for some time, and its purpose is to confirm that the instruction is still effective weeks, months, and even years later.

Criterion-referenced Assessment	Criterion-referenced tests compare a person's knowledge or skills against a predetermined standard, learning goal, performance level, or other criterion. With criterion-referenced tests, each person's performance is compared directly to the standard, without considering how other students perform on the test
Culture of Assessment	An environment in which continuous improvement through the systematic collection, review, and use of information is expected and valued.
Culture of Evidence	(1) An environment in which important decisions are based on the study of relevant data. (2) An environment in which the use of research and/or assessment results to guide policy and decisions is expected and valued.
Diagnostic Assessment	A form of pre- or post-assessment where teachers can evaluate students' strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills at the beginning or end of their instruction.
Direct Measures of Learning	Students (learners) are asked to demonstrate knowledge and skills they have learned rather than reflect upon it.
Educational Unit	Any department of the institution that is responsible for the educational functions of the institution. (Also known as Instructional Unit.)
Embedded Assessment	A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching learning process.
Evaluation	(1) When used for most educational settings, evaluation means to measure, compare, and judge the quality of student work, schools, or specific educational programs. (2) A value judgment about the results of assessment data. For example, evaluation of student learning requires that educators compare student performance to a standard to determine how the student measures up. Depending on the result, decisions are made regarding whether and how to improve student performance.
External Examiner	Using an expert in the field from outside your program, usually from a similar program at another institution to conduct, evaluate, or supplement assessment of your students. Information can be obtained from external evaluators using many methods including surveys, interviews, etc.
Focus groups	Typically conducted with 7-12 individuals who share certain characteristics that are related to a particular topic, area or assessment question. Group discussions are conducted by a trained moderator with participants to identify trends/patterns in perceptions.
Formative Assessment	The process of gathering and evaluating information about student learning during the progression of a course or program and used repeatedly to improve the learning of those students.
Goals	Goals describe the purpose (answers the question "why") for what your unit does or the services that your unit provides. They are used to express intended results in general terms. The term goals are used to describe broad learning concepts.

Indirect Measures of Learning	Students (learners) are asked to reflect on their learning rather than to demonstrate it.
Institutional Effectiveness	The documented process of measuring how well an institution is achieving its mission and addressing its strategic plan for the purpose of continuous improvement of <i>student learning, student development, and administrative unit operations</i> .
Interviews	Conversations or direct questioning with an individual or group of people.
Ipsative Assessment	Assessment that measures or tracks the progress of the individual by comparing their performance against their own previous performances. The "personal best" performance is established as the standard against which the outcome is judged. (Also known as Self-referenced Assessment.)
Key Performance Indicators (KPI)	Quantitative data which measures progress (or lack thereof) towards achieving a strategic goal
Measurements	Design of strategies, techniques and instruments for collecting feedback data that evidence the extent to which students demonstrate the desired behaviors.
Methods of Assessment	Techniques or instruments used in assessment.
Mission	Defines the fundamental purpose of an organization or an enterprise, succinctly describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its Vision.
Norm-referenced Assessment	Norm-referenced measures compare a person's knowledge or skills to the knowledge or skills of a norm group of peers.
Objectives	Objectives identify the measurable activity being undertaken to achieve a goal and are used to express intended results in precise terms. Further, objectives are more specific as to what needs to be assessed and thus are a more accurate guide in selecting appropriate assessment tools.
Outcomes	The learning results—the end results—the knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits of mind that students <i>have or have not</i> taken with them as a result of the students' experience in the course(s) or program.
Portfolios	Collections of multiple student work samples usually compiled over time and rated using rubrics.
Qualitative Methods of Assessment	Methods that rely on descriptions or perceptions rather than numbers.
Quantitative Methods of Assessment	Methods that rely on numerical scores or ratings.
Rubric	A set of categories that define and describe the important components of the work being completed, critiqued, and assessed. Each category contains a gradation of levels of completion or competence with a score assigned to each level and a clear description of what criteria need to be met to attain the score at each level.

S.A.C.S.C.O.C.	(Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) One of six voluntary, non-governmental, membership associations that accredits degree-granting colleges and universities in the Southeast region. The region includes: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Latin America, and several locations internationally.
Self-referenced Assessment	Assessment that measures or tracks the progress of the individual by comparing their performance against their own previous performances. The "personal best" performance is established as the standard against which the outcome is judged. (Also known as Ipsative Assessment.)
S.M.A.R.T. Objectives	Written objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely.
Strategic Planning	A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.
Summative Assessment	The gathering of information at the conclusion of a course, program, or undergraduate career to improve learning or to meet accountability demands. When used for improvement, summative assessment results impact the next cohort of students taking the course or program.
Surveys	Inquiries commonly used with open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed ended questions require respondents to answer the question from a provided list of responses. Typically, the list is a progressive scale ranging from low to high, or strongly agree to strongly disagree.
Task	A piece of work to be done or undertaken; usually done or assigned as part of one's duties. Related words include function, operation.
Unit	An individual, group, department or division of the institution given responsibility for the implementation of institutional effectiveness (ie. planning and assessment).
Vision	Defines the way an organization or enterprise will look in the future. Vision is a long-term view, sometimes describing what the organization wishes to be in the future.