

Northern Illinois University

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Understanding and Using Assessment Results

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Today...

1. What is assessment?
2. What is “good” assessment?
3. Setting standards or benchmarks
4. Sharing assessment results
5. Using assessment results to improve teaching & learning



1. What is Assessment of Student Learning?



- Deciding what we want our students to learn
- Making sure they learn it!

--Jane Wolfson, Director, Environmental Science & Studies Program, Towson University

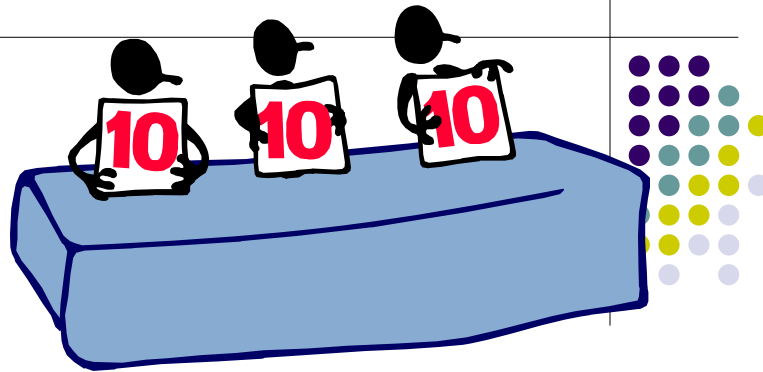
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The Teaching-Learning-Assessment Cycle



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2. What is “Good” Assessment?

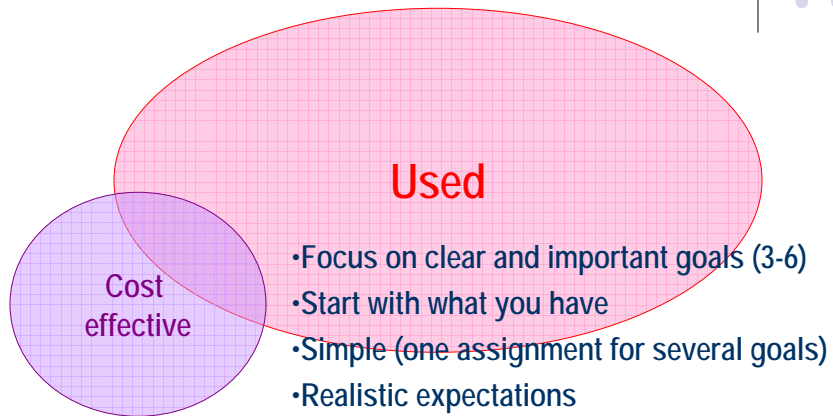


Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

Used

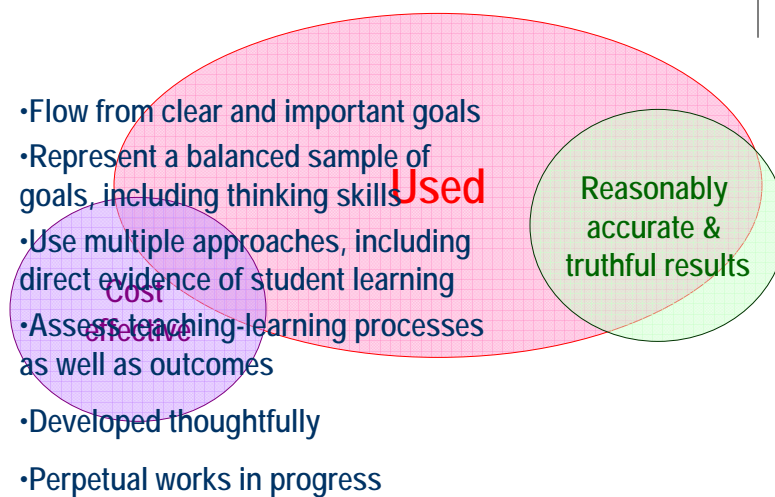
- Are planned and purposeful
- Focus on clear and important goals
- Active participation of stakeholders
- Results communicated widely and transparently
- Results used fairly, ethically, and responsibly

Five Dimensions of Good Assessment



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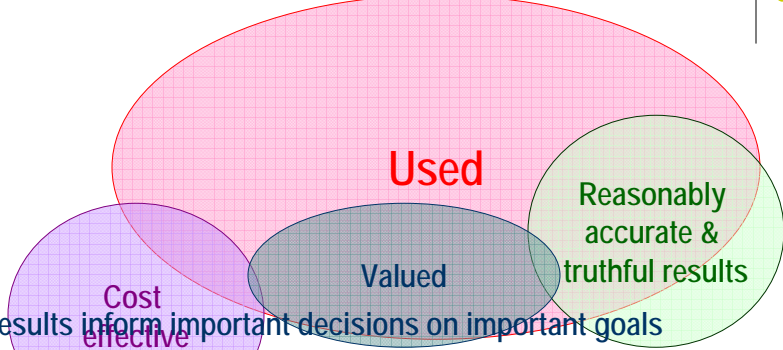
Five Dimensions of Good Assessment



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Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

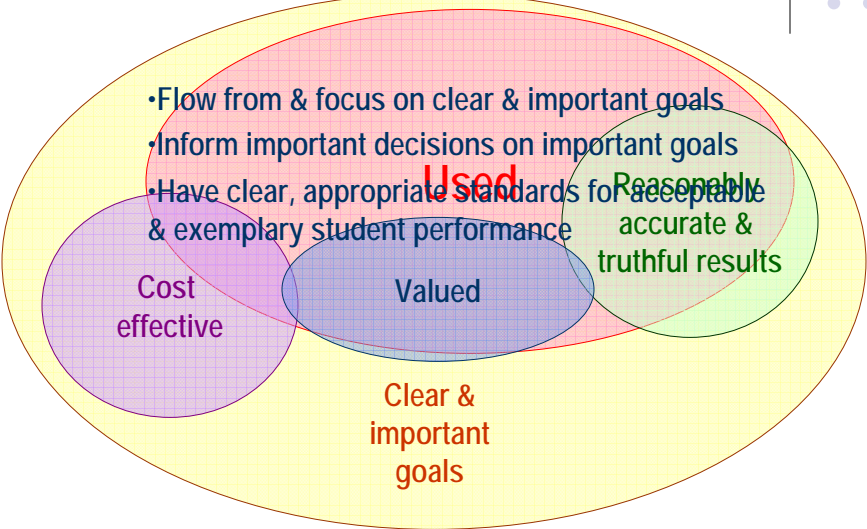


- Results inform important decisions on important goals
- Assessment efforts are recognized/honored
- Innovation, risk-taking, efforts to improve teaching are recognized/honored
- Sustained
- Supported with appropriate resources

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Five Dimensions of Good Assessment



- Flow from & focus on clear & important goals
- Inform important decisions on important goals
- Have clear, appropriate standards for acceptable & exemplary student performance

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Time to Talk!



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3. Setting Benchmarks or Standards: How Good is Good Enough?



Michael earned 55 points on the midterm.



- Did he do well on the midterm?

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To decide if Michael “did well,” we must compare his 55 against something else.



- *Benchmark*
- *Standard*
- *Target*
- *Frame of reference*
- *Lens*
- *Criterion*
- *“Brightline”*
- The “something else” depends on what we want the test to tell us.

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Suppose 35 is passing
and 80 is a perfect score.



- **Local standards**
 - *aka competency-based*
 - *aka criterion-referenced*
- Question answered:
 - **Are our students meeting our standards?**
- Challenge:
 - *Establishing sound performance standards*

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Suppose 35 is passing
and 80 is a perfect score
on a published exam.



- **External standards**
 - *aka competency-based*
 - *aka criterion-referenced*
- Question answered:
 - **Are our students meeting external standards?**
- Challenge:
 - *Do the standards match what we think is important?*

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Suppose the class average is 65.



- **Peer** benchmark
- *aka norm-referenced*
- Question answered:
 - **How do our students compare to peers?**
- Challenge:
 - *Identifying appropriate peers & collecting info from them*

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Suppose Michael scored 25 a year ago.



- **Value-added** benchmark
 - *aka growth, change, pre-post*
- Question answered:
 - **Are our students improving?**
- Challenges:
 - *Transfers in or out*
 - *Motivating students on pre-test*
 - *Is growth due to us?*
 - *Imprecise assessments mask growth*
 - *Is this question relevant?*

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Suppose class average is 65 now
and 40 three years ago.



- **Historical trends** benchmark
 - *aka improvement*
 - *aka (incorrectly) longitudinal*
- Questions answered:
 - **Are our teaching & curricula improving?**
 - **Are we getting better?**
- Challenge:
 - *Using the same assessment*

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Suppose Michael scored
a 65 for knowledge and
a 45 for real-world applications.



- **Strengths and weaknesses** benchmark
- Question answered:
 - **What are our students' relative strengths and areas for improvement?**
- Challenge:
 - *Getting "sub-scores" that are truly comparable*

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Suppose Michael's 55 cost \$400
and Melissa's 55 cost \$300.



- **Productivity** benchmark
- Question answered:
 - **Are we getting the most for our investment?**
- Challenge:
 - *Calculating cost and benefit accurately*
 - *Keeping the focus on effectiveness as well as efficiency*

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Which benchmark or standard
should you use?



- Each has advantages and disadvantages.
- Each gives a somewhat incomplete picture.
- **Multiple perspectives** give the most balanced picture of student learning.

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Time to talk again!



3. Sharing Assessment Results



Why are you assessing your program or curriculum?



- Validate it to others (accountability)
- **Improve it**
- Make sure it isn't slipping

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Keep assessment summaries **useful** to you and your colleagues.



- Who on campus **or off campus** needs to see the results?
- Why? What decisions will they make?
- What do they need to see to make those decisions?

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What decisions will your assessment help with?



- **Learning goals**
 - *Are our learning goals sufficiently clear and focused?*
- **Curriculum**
 - *What is the value of service learning?*
 - *Should our courses have more uniformity across sections?*
- **Teaching methods**
 - *Is online instruction as effective as traditional instruction?*
 - *Is collaborative learning more effective than traditional lectures?*
 - *Are we developing a community of scholars?*
- **Assessments**
 - *Have our assessments been useful?*
- **Resource allocations**
 - *Where should we commit our resources first?*

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Time to Talk!



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Keep assessment summaries short and simple.



- **Fast and easy to read and understand**
 - Use short, simple charts, graphs, and lists.
 - *Use PowerPoint presentations.*
 - *Avoid narrative text.*
 - First aggregate (sum up) data, then drill down into details as needed.
 - Round results.
 - Sort results from highest to lowest.
 - Percentages may be more meaningful than averages.
 - *Avoid complex statistics.*
 - As you collect results over time, show trends.

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Tell a story.



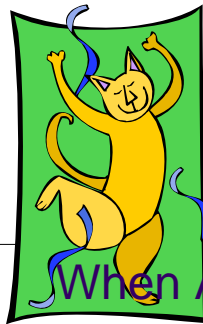
- Key questions to address:
 - *What have you learned about your students' learning?*
 - *What are you going to do about what you have learned?*
 - *When, where, and how are you going to do it?*
 - Doug Eder
- Focus on “big news.”
 - *Have a statistician identify meaningful vs. insignificant differences.*
- Find someone skilled at finding the stories in reams of data.

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Time to Talk Again!



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Using Assessment Results
to Improve Teaching & Learning

When Assessment Results
Are Good

Celebrate!

Publicize!



When assessment results are disappointing...

- Goals
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Assessments



Look at your learning goals.

- Are your goals inappropriate or overly ambitious?
- Do your goals need to be clarified?
- Do you have too many goals?



Look at your curriculum.



- Including placement and developmental education.
- Does the curriculum adequately address each learning goal?



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Look at your teaching methods.



- How do student learn best?



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Time to Think & Discuss!



Look at your assessments.



- Are they poorly written and misinterpreted?
- Do they match your key learning goals?
- Are they too difficult for most responsible students?

Isn't poor performance the student's fault?



- Sometimes, but usually a minority
- Suskie's "50% rule"



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Time to Think and Discuss!



Questions?

