

AAHE – 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

- 1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.**
 - a. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement.
 - b. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

- 2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed at performance over time.**
 - a. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only the knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom.
 - b. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration.

- 3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.**
 - a. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations – those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals.
 - b. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is useful.

- 4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.**
 - a. To improve outcomes we need to know about student experiences along the way – about curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes.
 - b. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

- 5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.**
 - a. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time.

- b. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

- a. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility.
- b. Assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

- a. Assessment approaches should produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made.
- b. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return “results”; it is a process that starts with questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

- a. Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked out.
- b. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution’s planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

- a. Our deeper obligation – to ourselves, our students, and society – is to improve.
- b. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.