Department of Institutional Effectiveness and Research

Assessment Methods for Support Units

The examples and tools included in this resource are intended to serve only as a reference and guide, not as an exclusive representation of all possible examples, tools, or best practices

Introduction to Assessments

Part of the effectiveness process at Texas A&M University-Commerce is not only to develop goals at the unit level, but also to measure the achievement of each goal. This measurement provides results in the form of actionable data that can then be used to drive decisions.

Assessing goals produces results…

To improve
- provide feedback to determine how the unit can be improved

To inform
- inform staff, faculty members, and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the unit and the development and growth of the university community

To prove
- encapsulate and demonstrate to the university community what the unit is accomplishing

To support
- support for campus decision-making activities such as unit review and strategic planning towards continuous improvement of an environment, processes, services, or expeirences that promotes student learning

Effective assessment should answer these questions:

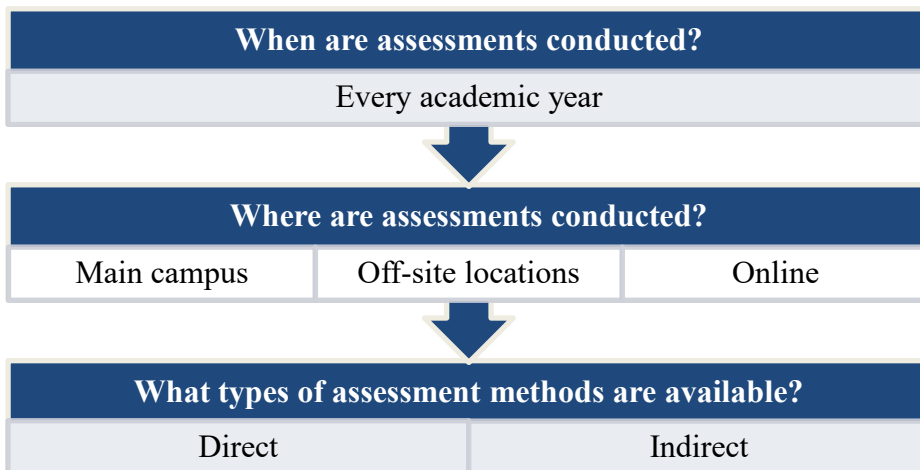What are you trying to do? How well are you doing it?

Using the answers to the first two questions, how can you improve what you are doing?

Assessment helps us look at what a unit does (processes, services, or experiences) to contribute to the work of the university in providing an environment that promotes student learning and identify how well it does those things.
The key question of assessment is
How can the environment that promotes student learning be improved?
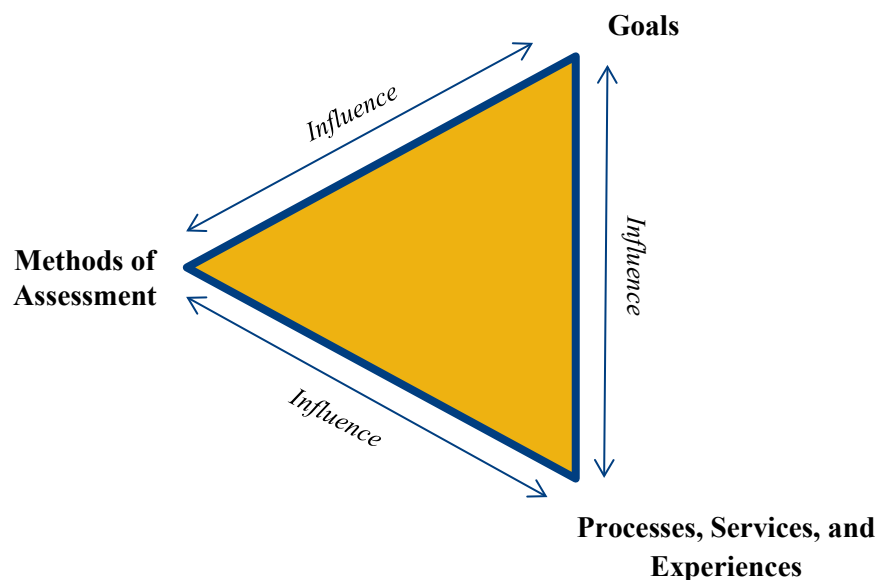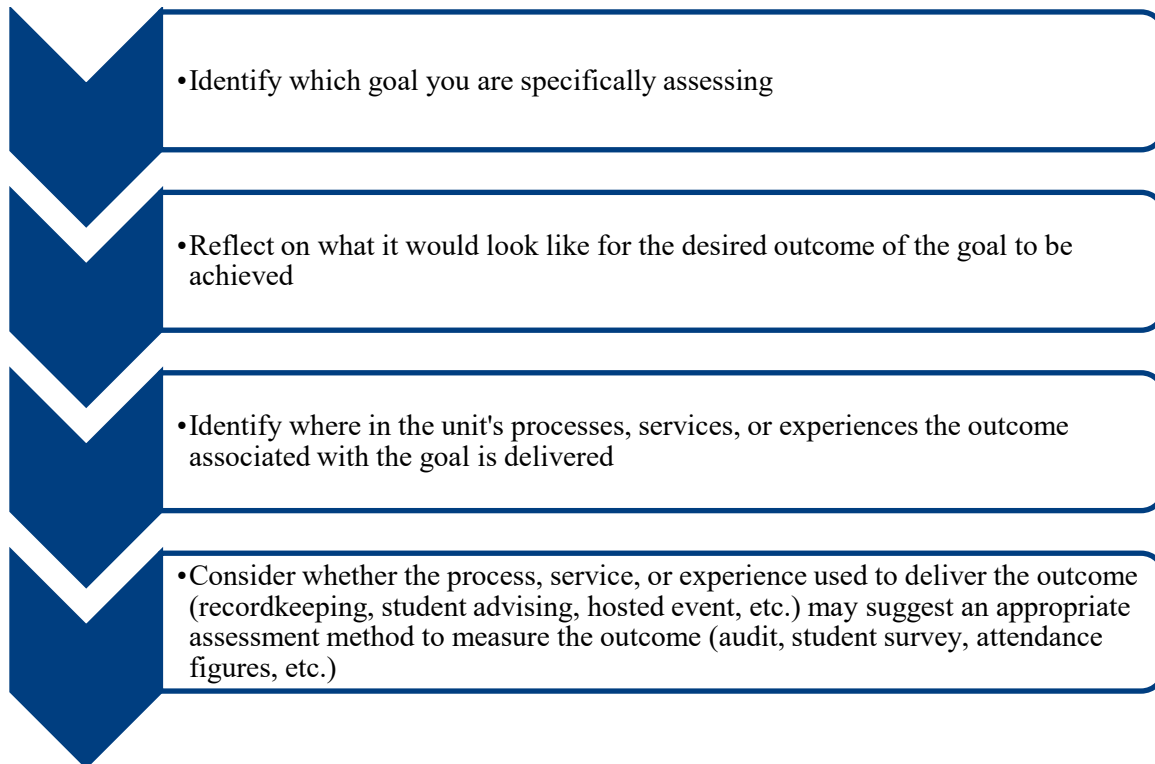
How to get started: Begin by reviewing these questions and answers.

When are assessments conducted?		
Every academic year		

Where are assessments conducted?		
Main campus	Off-site locations	Online

What types of assessment methods are available?	
Direct	Indirect

Goal-Method of Assessment Alignment

Before selecting an assessment method, first consider what goal is being assessed and how the unit supports the accomplishment of that goal.

Alignment

- Identify which goal you are specifically assessing

- Reflect on what it would look like for the desired outcome of the goal to be achieved

- Identify where in the unit's processes, services, or experiences the outcome associated with the goal is delivered

- Consider whether the process, service, or experience used to deliver the outcome (recordkeeping, student advising, hosted event, etc.) may suggest an appropriate assessment method to measure the outcome (audit, student survey, attendance figures, etc.)

Goals

Influence

Influence

Methods of Assessment

Influence

Processes, Services, and Experiences

Selecting an Assessment Method

Direct vs. Attitudinal Methods of Assessment

When selecting an assessment method, best practices indicate that a combination of both direct and indirect (also known as attitudinal) assessment measures provides the most comprehensive evaluation of goals.

Direct Methods	Indirect (Attitudinal) Methods
Tally or measure the performance of unit processes. Provide evidence of completion of processes, services, and experiences	Look at attitudes, perceptions, or opinions about support unit processes, services, and experiences
Examples: counts, institutional data, external audit	Examples: survey, focus group

Methods of assessment can be efforts that are already used or are readily available in existing services, processes, and experiences. However, especially focus on selecting assessments which will provide information that is relevant to the goal, information that can be acted upon, and information that can lead to improvements.

| Examples of Commonly Used Assessments	
Direct Methods	**Indirect Methods**
Institutional Data	Student Surveys
Enrollment Data	Faculty and Staff Surveys
Graduation Rate and Retention Statistics	Alumni Surveys
Unit Records	Employer Surveys
Audit Reports	Questionnaires
Financial Reports	Event Evaluations
Logs	Interviews
Usage Statistics	Focus Groups
Attendance Figures	Advisory Board Consultations
Website Traffic	
External Reviews/Audits	
Error Rates	
Response Time	
Student Demonstrations of Learning	

Multiple Assessments
If a goal seems difficult to assess, consider measuring it through multiple assessments so as to collect different types of information about the desired outcome. While no one measure may offer a complete assessment of the goal, looking at the outcome from multiple angles may provide a fuller picture of achievement and provide actionable information for improvement.

**All goals should be assessed by at least one method of assessment.**

Assessment #1 → Goal #1 / Goal #2
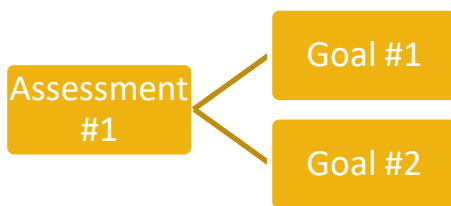
Best practices recommend, when possible, to utilize multiple (and varied) methods of assessment to assess a goal.

Assessment #1 → Goal #1 / Goal #2
Assessment #2 — Goal #2
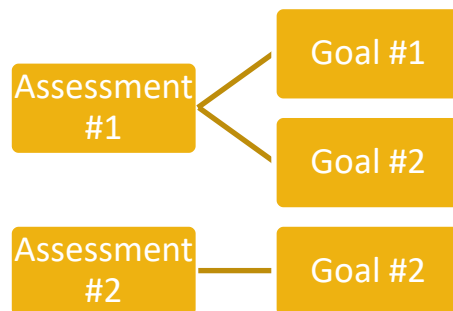
When choosing an assessment method, consider the characteristics that encompass an effective assessment measure. The M.A.T.U.R.E acronym is one tool that can be used to assist in understanding the characteristics that encompass an effective assessment measure.

Use the M.A.T.U.R.E. graphic below to select an assessment method

Match · **A**ppropriate · **T**arget · **U**seful · **R**eliable · **E**ffective & **E**fficient
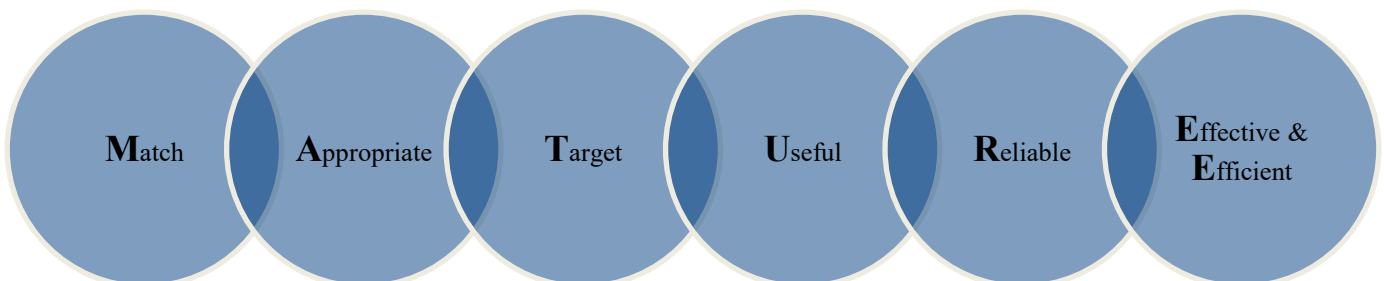
Match

Match the goal with the appropriate assessment method. Successful and useful assessment cannot be achieved if you do not align the assessment method with the goal that you are trying to assess.

Appropriate

Choose methods that are appropriate. They can be direct or indirect (attitudinal). Direct measures include assessments that evaluate a quality indicator. Indirect (attitudinal) measures include assessments that consider respondent attitudes, such as surveys. There are times when one assessment can measure more than one goal. (For example, a survey may target several goals.) Consider measures that provide you with information that is easily interpreted, unambiguous, and valuable.

Target

Each measure should be directed. It should specify, when possible, the desired level of performance (establish a standard of quality or effectiveness). This may influence the standard of success.

Useful

Choose assessment methods that will provide you with useful and actionable information. The measure that you are trying to assess should be one that would allow you to make inferences about the progress toward the desired outcome at the heart of the goal.

Reliable

The measure is based on tested, known methods. The method selected should be one that provides dependable, consistent results time after time. The instrument should be clearly worded and not ambiguous. The time available to complete the instrument should be consistent with its length.

Effective & Efficient

Each approach accurately and concisely measures the goal. The benefits of using more than one method include: (i) different components can be assessed, and (ii) a high level of accuracy and authority can be achieved. When possible, utilize a combination of direct and indirect (attitudinal) assessment methods to effectively assess goals. The selection of assessment methods should reflect the culture of the unit and should include methods that provide those responsible for making changes to the unit's processes, services, or experiences with useful information.

Standard of Success

How do I determine if the unit has sufficiently achieved its goal? In the assessment plan, in addition to identifying the assessment method that will be used to assess each goal, it is also necessary to identify the standard of success by which the support unit will evaluate performance. This standard will reflect the level of achievement sufficient to demonstrate that the unit is currently accomplishing its goals.

When writing a standard of success statement, consider how to include the following elements, as applicable:

Description of who or what is being assessed
Description of the target achievement
Description of the indicator or evaluation

Example
Standard of Success Statements

o *The percentage of recycling program users (staff, faculty, and students) will increase by 15% by May 2020.*

o *75% of staff will report that the quality of services "meets expectations" or "exceeds expectations" when rated on a five point likert scale (unsatisfactory = 1 to exceeds expectations = 5)*

o *Host at least 7 events a year. Attendance at each individual event will reach 30 or more students.*

A helpful tip for evaluating the strength of your standard of success statement is to flip it –

For example, if your standard is set at 75% of staff will rate the quality of services as "meets expectations" or "exceeds expectations," does that mean your unit is comfortable with 25% of staff being less than satisfied?

Simplifying Assessments

Don't reinvent the wheel. In many cases, there may already be information available on a unit's processes, services, or experiences which can be re-purposed for the use of IE assessment. For example, an audit which is required for an annual report or external agency or an institutional survey which includes questions specific to the unit's operations or services. If a record or tool already exists, there is no need to create a new one if the assessment already aligns directly with the unit's goals.
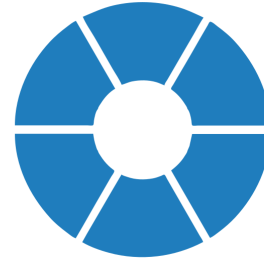
Establish routine processes and practical timing. As much as possible, build data collection into the unit's normal processes so that it becomes a routine, even automatic, activity. Embed assessments into specific unit activities so that the data will be there when needed instead of realizing at the end of the semester or year that an assessment has not been conducted.

Be clear about the audience of your assessments. When choosing an assessment, think about for whom the assessment is intended and how the unit will identify targeted processes or respondents. For example, if setting up a focus group, consider what the make-up of the group should be—students, staff, employers? Or, if setting up a log to record service usage, consider what services should be logged and by whom.

Also consider carefully when during the year an assessment should occur. Will data collection be on-going or specific to one time only? Will intervening variables affect the data collection? For example, will sending a survey out the Friday before a holiday weekend lower your response rate?

> Assessment is most effective when it represents an ongoing and collaborative dialogue.

Share the responsibility. Assessment is meant to be shared by multiple stakeholders rather than centralized by one individual. Although the IE Author has the responsibility of documenting the assessment plan and results, best practices suggest that multiple individuals be involved in the planning, administration, and results collection and analysis.

Communicate clearly with all unit members who bear responsibility for administering assessments to establish clear procedures and agreement on methods. For example, if multiple event organizers are responsible for administering event evaluations, make sure they all know where to locate copies of the evaluations and where to return them once completed. Involve staff, faculty, and leadership in the analysis of results so that diverse perspectives for recommendations of continuous improvement can be heard.

References

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