

# Glossary

**Assessment** is an ongoing, systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and using qualitative and/or quantitative data for the purpose of improving student learning. Assessment is conducted at multiple levels, such as student-level, course-level, program-level, and institution-level. Assessment is also used for multiple purposes, including formative and summative assessment. For more information, see [Miller and Leskes \*Levels of Assessment\*](#)

The **Assessment Cycle** is the systematic collection, review, and use of evidence for the purpose of improving student learning.

**Direct Measures of Student Learning** allow students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and dispositions relative to the stated student learning outcome(s). Examples include student work samples, portfolios, essays, capstone projects, embedded test questions, and state/nationally normed tests.

**Externally informed benchmarks** are targets for student attainment set by and/or in collaboration with constituencies outside the institution. Examples include advisory boards, peer institutions, and national norms.

**Formative Assessment** occurs when the assessment process at the individual student or at the program level is conducted to monitor progress and provide corrective feedback, explanations, and actions for improvement that can be used to assist students, faculty, and program leaders in addressing problems and meeting their respective goals or objectives. This assessment occurs during a course or program and is usually low stakes and therefore has little or no point or grade value. Examples range from class discussion with questions and answers, brief papers, classroom response systems (clickers), relatively low stakes tests and projects, and other instructor feedback that can be formal or informal.

**Goals** are statements that provide broad philosophical and/or conceptual priorities for an institution, program, or course.

**Indirect Measures of Student Learning** allow students to report perceptions of self and learning gains. Examples include surveys, interviews, job placement rates, and self-evaluations.

**Objectives** are statements that break down an associated goal into its components to provide further explanation and analysis.

**Performance Indicators** are specific indicators of a quality or quantity of an attribute(s) being measured to demonstrate the attainment of a goal or objective. At the student-level, these are usually *direct or indirect measures* of student performance. At the course-, program- and institution-level, the indicators also include measures of student achievement and success, such as persistence rates and graduate/professional school acceptance rates. In addition, performance indicators can be external reviews, cost/benefit analyses, and similar measures.

**Student Learning Goals/Outcomes** are statements that indicate specific and measurable performance expectations for students.

**Summative Assessment** occurs when the assessment process is conducted to demonstrate or certify that a goal or objective has or has not been met. This happens at the end of a course or program or at other

significant junctures in courses and programs. Summative assessment is designed to show student learning and to meet program accountability needs. These assessments are usually high stakes and therefore have a high point or grade value. Examples include midterm and final exams, final projects, major papers, senior recitals, major oral and multimedia presentations, and major field tests.

**Targets** are the predetermined performance criteria or cut-scores that indicate achievement of a goal or objective.