

Comprehensive Model of Assessment

The following seven-step approach to assessment (Upcraft, Schuh) will be used by the Student Affairs Division at Valdosta State University.

- 1) Tracking, or Frequency of use
- 2) Needs Assessment
- 3) Satisfaction Assessment
- 4) Student Cultures and Campus Environment Assessment
- 5) Outcomes Assessment
- 6) Comparable Institution Assessment, or Benchmarking
- 7) Measuring Effectiveness

1) Tracking

The first component of a student affairs assessment program is *keeping track of who uses your student services, programs and facilities*. Furthermore, how many clients are using student affairs offerings, and how are they described by gender, race, age, class standing, residence and other important variables?

Why should we track our clientele?

- If our intended clients do not use what we offer, then our purpose will not be achieved.
- We want to keep track of who and how many because this will help us to determine what services, programs and facilities we should offer.
- We must know that our clients and users are representative of the student population.
- Can assist in determining resource allocation and resource requirements; examine alternatives and help to determine if there is a need to expand what we currently offer.
- Provides for a foundation to start at for the purpose of establishing a benchmark.

2) Needs Assessment

The second component of this model is *assessing student and other clientele needs*. The basic principle is that we should meet the needs of our students, but often it is not easy to accomplish.

Needs assessment seeks to answer questions such as

- What kinds of services, programs, and facilities do students and other clientele need, based on student and staff perceptions, institutional expectations, and research on student needs?
- How do we distinguish between student wants and needs?
- How do we know if what we offer fits our clientele?

Some needs assessment techniques are

- Questionnaires,
- Interviews or focus groups,
- Observations,
- Polling opinions, and
- Reading the School Newspaper Editorials.

3) Satisfaction Assessment

The third component is *assessing student and other clientele satisfaction with our services, programs and facilities, and that those experiences are consistent with the institution's goals*. Furthermore, this type of assessment will provide important understandings of students' experience on campus.

Satisfaction assessment seeks to determine

1. Of those persons who use our services, programs, and facilities, what is their level of satisfaction?
2. What strengths and weaknesses do they identify?

Static Measures of satisfaction (available without undertaking a complex research study):

1. Persistence – do students persist to graduation?
2. Participation Rates – is there a pattern of increase or decrease?
3. Spending Patterns – do students spend their money on campus, or for off-campus activities?
4. Membership Recruitment and Retention – are student groups meeting the needs of students?
5. Programs – who is offering them and how many?
6. Student newspapers – what campus issues appear in the stories, editorials, and letters? What is their tone, etc.?

Active Measures of Student Satisfaction (specific techniques that can be used when conducting an assessment):

1. Quantitative measures (normalized surveys and ad hoc measures)
2. Qualitative measures (interviews, reviewing documents, observing behavior, "secret shopper", etc.)

4) Student Cultures and Campus Environment Assessment

It is important to look at the collective perceptions of a campus and the student cultures where they conduct their day-to-day lives. Remember each student lives in his/her own cultural environment and all students do not have the same interests, friends and classes. Assessing the campus environment determines and evaluates how the conditions and elements of the campus affect student learning and growth. Each campus is unique and different.

Assessing student cultures and campus environments would seek to answer questions such as.

- Who are our students? Where do they come from? Why do they choose VSU? What do they want from their university experience? What does the institution expect from its students?
- How are students socialized into the culture of VSU? What subcultures exist? How are they treated?
- What is the quality of life in the residence halls? For off-campus students? For commuters?
- What is the academic environment, both inside and outside the classroom?
- What is the history and traditions of the university?

There are numerous models and techniques to measure a campus environment. The best way to possibly measure our (VSU) campus environment may be by using a nationally known instrument or using resources on campus such as Institutional Research or student interviews.

5) Outcomes

A fifth component is *assessing outcomes*. For those who use our services, programs and facilities, is there an effect on their academic success, learning, or development, particularly when compared to those non-users? Not all outcomes important to student services and programs are learning outcomes. There may be other outcomes important to effective student services, such as the delivery of services in a timely and efficient manner.

Outcome assessment is the most valid way to demonstrate the effectiveness of student services; however it is also the most difficult, complex and misunderstood of all assessment methodologies.

6) Comparable Institutional Assessment, or Benchmarking

How does the quality of our services, programs and facilities compare with like institutions? The key is to compare ourselves to like institutions that have good assessment programs and collect good data.

When conducted properly, a benchmarking study can (1) justify existence, (2) improve quality, (3) demonstrate affordability, (4) develop strategic plans, (5) formulate policy, and (6) aid in decision making.

7) Measuring Effectiveness

A seventh component is *assessing effectiveness - through reference to national or professional standards and/or through measuring cost effectiveness*. How do our services, programs, and facilities compare to accepted national standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Student Services/Development Programs, various national and regional accrediting agencies, and professional organizations)? Are the benefits students derive from what we offer worth the cost, and how do we know that?