**ASSESSMENT TERMINOLOGY**

**Assessment:** any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness.\(^4\)

**Research vs. Assessment**
In the 1960s and 1970s it was routine to use the term “student affairs research” to refer to both assessment and evaluation efforts. The term proved to be confusing, mainly to faculty, who had a more narrow definition of research.\(^4\) Although they share many processes in common, they differ in at least two major respects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Guides good practice</td>
<td>- Guides theory and conceptual foundations</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Has implications for a single institution</td>
<td>- Has broader implications for student affairs and higher education</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Can accommodate limited time and resources</td>
<td>- Requires extensive time, resources, and expertise</td>
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**Evaluation:** any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness.\(^4\)

- **Formative evaluations:** are those used to improve organizational or institutional effectiveness and may also be used to help solve problems and to enhance decision making directed toward improvement (focuses on feedback)
- **Summative evaluations:** are used to determine if a particular organizational activity or function should be continued, enhanced, curtailed, or eliminated. In other words, summative evaluations are conducted for purposes of accountability and strategic planning (makes decisions on quality, worth).

**Types of Assessment**
- **Learning Outcomes Assessment:** measuring the impact our services, programs and facilities have on students’ learning, development, and student success
- **Tracking:** monitoring who uses our programs, services and facilities (e.g. raw numbers, frequency, age, class standing, gender, race, and residence)
- **Needs Assessment:** identifying needs of our students (e.g. student perceived, research supported).
- **Satisfaction Assessment:** measuring the level of student satisfaction with our programs, services, and facilities
- **Student Cultures and Campus Environments Assessment:** assessing the collective perception of campus and student experience (e.g. campus climate, academic environment, residential quality of life)
- **Comparable Institution Assessment (Benchmarking):** identifying how the quality of our programs, services and facilities compare with peer institutions’ best practices
- **National Standards Assessment:** using nationally accepted standards to assess our programs and services (e.g. national assessment inventory – EBI, CAS standard self-assessment, departmental review by consulting group)
- **Cost Effectiveness Assessment:** determining whether the programs, services and facilities we offer to students are

**Assessment of Student Learning:** the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning.\(^5\)

**Student Learning:** a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development, processes that have often been considered separate, and even independent of each other. Learning, then, does not mean exclusively or primarily academic instruction, the acquisition of disciplinary content or classroom learning – though the rich definition of learning certainly incorporates and includes all of those things.\(^3\)

- **Direct Methods** - any process employed to gather data that requires students to display their knowledge, behavior, or thought processes\(^1\)
- **Indirect Methods** - any process employed to gather data that asks students to reflect upon their knowledge, behaviors, or thought processes\(^1\)
Learning Outcomes: examine cognitive skills that students develop through department interactions; measurable, transferable skill development. These are statements that indicate what students (participants) will know, think, or be able to do as a result of an event, activity, or program.

Program Outcomes: examine what a program or process is to do, achieve, or accomplish for its own improvement and/or in support of institutional or divisional goals; generally numbers, needs, or satisfaction driven.

Compliance and Accreditation
- Objectives: reflect important administrative initiatives or improvements a department has identified for the academic year; describe specific ways by which division goals will be accomplished
- Activities: support an objective or a division goal; an activity is not measured; it is a task that contributes to meeting an objective
- Measures: identify the evidence and methods you will use to determine whether you are achieving objectives
- Findings: the quantifiable data that result when measures are completed
- Action Plans: strategy for improvement and potential tasks based on the results of findings for the following year

CAS (The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education): a consortium of professional associations concerned with the development and promulgation of professional standards and guidelines for student support programs and services in institutions of higher learning.²

CAS Standards and Guidelines: published criteria and related statements designed to provide college and university support service providers with established measures against which to evaluate programs and services. A standard uses the auxiliary verbs “must” and “shall,” while a guideline uses the verbs “should” and “may.” Standards are essentials and printed in bold, guidelines are not.²

Self-study (or program review): an internal process by which institutions and programs evaluate their quality and effectiveness in reference to established criteria such as the CAS standards. This process, often used for institutional and specialty accreditation purposes, results in a formal report presenting the findings of the internal evaluation implemented by institutional employees. For accreditation purposes, this report is then validated by a visiting, external committee of peers from comparable institutions or programs.²

Self-Assessment Guide (SAG): an operational version of the CAS Standards and Guidelines designed to provide users with an assessment tool that can be used for self-study or self-assessment purposes. A SAG is available for each functional area for which a CAS standard exists.²

Persistence: refers to the act of continuing towards an educational goal (i.e., earning a degree or staying enrolled)

Retention: A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall.⁸

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