

Isothermal Community College

Model for the Assessment of Instructional Areas

I. OVERVIEW

The Model for the Assessment of Instructional Areas provides a step-by-step approach to:

1. Develop assessment plans for each instructional area;
2. Implement, report and analyze findings from assessment, reviewing and incorporating best practice literature where appropriate;
3. Use findings to develop, implement, and evaluate improvement plans;
4. And integrate assessment with other college processes, including annual planning for staff development and equipment, strategic planning and budgeting and staff and faculty evaluation

The Model was designed with input from the instructional deans and directors, and it is consistent with work already completed by the college. The Model is meant to bring further clarity and consistency to the development, implementation, and analysis of an assessment system at ICC. The Model allows for flexibility of design within academic programs; it is not a straightjacket approach. Deans and directors develop individual assessment systems in ways that best fit their area, while conforming to the conceptual framework provided by this model. A shared conceptual framework expedites the sharing of assessments across the instructional areas of the college. There is a similar model for the assessment of administrative and student support areas of the college.

A. Purposes

Assessment is an ongoing, systematic process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance.

When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help focus collective attention, examine assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (Thomas A. Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p.7).

The purposes of assessing student academic achievement at Isothermal Community College are:

1. To document for various constituencies that learning has occurred through the student's attainment of specified cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviors;
2. To improve teaching and learning within classes and programs;

3. And, to make appropriate, informed decisions about curriculum, standards, instruction and allocation of resources.

B. Responsibilities

Assessment of student learning is the domain of all faculty. All full-time faculty participate in the assessment cycle as part of their professional responsibilities and commitment to institutional and program missions. Adjunct faculty should have opportunity to participate in the planning, implementation and response/action phases of the assessment cycle to the extent deemed appropriate and practical by the instructional area. Similarly, each academic area should explore ways that students can be involved in the process.

Above the classroom-level, the academic program within an academic area has primary responsibility for implementing assessment plans under the leadership of the area dean or director. The Vice-President of Academic & Student Affairs has general oversight responsibility and the Director of Assessment, Planning, and Research provides support.

C. Unit of Analysis

With a few exceptions (i.e., developmental education) assessment focuses on the student intending to graduate or take a significant part of the curriculum. The college can most readily see the relationship between curriculum experience at Isothermal and the attainment of program learning outcomes for these students. Assessment also focuses on the core courses within various academic programs.

Each dean determines the unit of analysis or what program(s) constitute an assessment group. Grouping similar programs together will expedite the process of assessment and help ensure that the system of assessment becomes sustainable and institutionalized.

D. Timeline

Assessment is an on-going process. Over a period of two or three years, all programs or aggregate of programs within an academic unit are working within the assessment cycle. Each year, various aggregates of academic areas are engaged in developing assessment plans, implementation and analyzing assessment findings, and/or the development and assessment of improvement projects based on results. Following is a conceptual timeline, tracing a single program through the cycle.

Year 1	Spring	Develop assessment plans
Year 2	Fall	Implement assessment plan
	Spring	Write annual report of assessment findings
	Spring	Develop improvement plans based on findings
Year 3	Fall	Implement improvement plans based on assessment findings
	Spring	Evaluate effectiveness of improvement plan initiatives

II. COMPONENTS OF ASSESSMENT PLAN

A. Program-Level Mission Statement and Program Outcomes

A program-level mission is a brief statement that is a description of the major academic goals of the program. The description describes the program's principal students and other key constituent groups. The statement directly links to the college mission. The statement is clear and jargon-free. It is specific enough to differentiate it from other programs at the college. The statement is often based on the catalog description.

The mission includes a listing of program outcomes. There are broad behaviors students are able to show and use after they have completed the program. The behaviors are specific, measurable over time and appropriate in levels of cognitive complexity. Typically, program would generate six or less of the broad program outcomes statements. The statements form the basis of the assessment plan for the program.

B. Curriculum Audit

The program curriculum audit identifies where (what classes) outcomes are addressed. The Curriculum audit:

- ensures that every program outcome has been taught and reinforced in an appropriate sequence;
- leads to a discussion of what activities are used in courses to teach and practice the behaviors described in the learning outcomes;
- provides a map of where the most appropriate places in the curriculum might be to assess students for particular outcomes
- helps instructors see how their own course content and outcomes fit into the larger picture of the program.

C. Activities/Assessments Review

The activities/assessment review identifies assignments and activities that promote achievement of program outcomes. The curriculum review answers the question, "Where do we teach and reinforce the knowledge, skills and values of the program?" The activities and assessments search answers the questions, "How do we introduce and reinforce the knowledge, skills and values of the program?" and "Where and how do we measure student attainment of course and program outcomes?"

Conducting the Curriculum Audit and Activities/Assessments Search with program faculty generates conversation about which program outcomes are most valued, how skills and concepts are built upon throughout the program, where instructional "gaps" may need to be filled, and how common activities and assessments can be collected across courses to serve both as course and program assessments.

Typical types of assessments used in program assessment include both direct and indirect measures of student learning.

Direct Measurement of Learning

Behavioral performance observations
Oral, written tests/exams
Simulations and role play
Case studies and analyses

Journals, logs, field notes
Portfolios
Lab reports, research papers
Rubrics/scoring guides

Indirect Measurement of Learning

Surveys, questionnaires
Student focus groups, exit interviews
Employer surveys, interviews
Benchmarks from industry/academic discipline
Archival records

D. Development of Assessment Plan

The assessment plan lists which program outcomes are measured. The plan then details when, where and how. After the curriculum audit has taken place, the foundation has been laid. The next steps are to choose the assessment instrument, means of measurement, and the timeline for assessment of the students who will be assessed. It is not necessary or practical to measure everything, for all classes, all the time. A carefully selected sample provides information suited for both learning documentation and planning for improvement. As important, a sample approach will produce a system that is sustainable over time.

As you design your assessment strategy, consider the following questions:

- Which program outcomes will you assess and why?
- What students will you assess and how many?
- In what parts of the program will you assess them?
- How often will the data be collected?
- What measures will you use?
- What assessments are already being used at the classroom level that could also provide data for program-level assessment?
- What assessment tools are the best fit for your content area and program outcomes?

Here is an example from an art program.

Program Outcome (What student will know or be able to do)	Who will be assessed?	When will they be assessed?	What is the assessment approach?	What is the measurement?
1. Articulate the creative process and its influence on project development	Students in ART 110, 114, 200 ----- Students in ART 112, 113 (sample of 5 students)	At end of course ----- All assignments	Oral critique Artist's statement Written critique	Rubric score
4. Utilize, analyze and synthesize the principles and elements of design.	Students in ART 110, 114, 200 ----- Students in ART 112, 113 (sample of 5 students)	At end of course ----- All assignments	Oral critique Artist's statement Written critique	Rubric score

In critiquing your plan you should consider the following questions.

- Have you identified who will be assessed (e.g., students in specific courses, graduates or former students of the program)?
- Have you shown when and where the assessments will be given?
- Do you have more than one assessment tool and measure for each program learning outcome (multiple measures)?
- Have you included assessment tools that measure learning directly?

III. IMPLEMENTATION AND ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Assessment findings are reported and updated on an annual basis. The annual report format includes three parts:

1. summary of the program outcome and the assessment strategy to inform that outcome
2. presentation of findings; and
3. discussion of implications and recommendations.

A. Context

For each program-level learning outcome provide the following:

- Objective—restate the student learning outcome
- Courses—identify the courses selected to inform the student learning outcome
- Assessments/Measures—discuss the multiple assessment measures used to inform objective. Include targets, comparisons, standards, etc. if appropriate.
- Assessment strategy—discuss the strategy or sampling approach used to collect the data

B. Findings

Present the findings using a narrative, tabular, graphic or a combination of these approaches. Just discuss the findings here, do not interpret the data.

C. Implications/Recommendations

Discuss implications of the findings and provide recommendations for improvement plans. Recommendations need to be supported by the data. Often a recommendation is supported from findings from more than one student learning outcome. Recommendations also supported by best practice in professional literature are encouraged.

IV. IMPROVEMENT PLANS AND EVALUATION

The process detailed below includes the typical elements needed to be addressed in advancing and communicating plans for improvement.

A. Improvement Plan

Objective and Rationale/Background

List the desired outcomes of the plan. Provide a brief rationale/background of the plan, include program assessment findings.

Activities

List the major activities of the plan.

Responsibility

List responsibility for conducting the plan.

Timeline

Give beginning and ending times.

Resource Allocation

Provide budget details if the improvement plan requires expenditures beyond the normal operation.

Assessment

Describe the procedure for measuring how effectively the project reached its objective.

B. Follow-up (following year)

Objective

List the desired outcomes of the plan.

Activities Completed

List activities completed, noting any significant difference from the original plan.

Resources Expended

List resources expended, noting any significant difference from original plan.

Assessment

Describe how effectively the project objective was reached. Include observable effects on student learning and instruction.

Future Plans

Describe future objectives leading from action plan results if appropriate.