

Isothermal Community College

**Model for the
Assessment of Student and Administrative
Support Areas**

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Table of Contents

	Page
I. Overview	1
A. Purposes	1
B. Responsibilities	2
C. Unit of Analysis	2
D. Timeline	2
II. Components of Assessment Plan	3
A. Departmental-Level Mission Statement and Basic Functions	3
B. Departmental Assessment Audit	3
C. Development of Assessment Plan	4
III. Implementation and Annual Assessment Reports	5
A. Context	5
B. Findings	6
C. Implications/Recommendations	6
IV. Improvement Plans and Evaluation	7
A. Improvement Plan	7
B. Follow-up (following year)	7

Isothermal Community College

Model for the Assessment of Student and Administrative Support Areas

I. OVERVIEW

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

1. Developing assessment plans for each support area
2. Implementing, reporting and analyzing findings from assessment, reviewing and incorporating best practice literature where appropriate
3. Using findings to develop, implement, and evaluate improvement plans
4. Integrating 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 student support deans and directors and directors in the administrative services area. The model 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 Isothermal Community College (ICC). The model allows for flexibility of design within support programs; it is not a straightjacket approach.

Deans and directors in the student and administrative support areas 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 provides a systemic and integrated approach to assessment and expedites the sharing of assessments across the support areas of the college. There is a similar model for the assessment of instructional areas of the college.

A. Purposes

Assessment is an ongoing, systematic process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. Student support areas clearly have a direct and indirect affect on student learning. While primarily indirect, the administrative support areas provide the essential infrastructure and processes in which all other areas of the college operate. Assessment involves:

- Making expectations explicit and public
- Setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality and administrative operations

- 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).

B. Responsibilities

Assessment of student and administrative support is the domain of all deans and directors serving in this area. Where appropriate, deans and directors involve their respective staffs in the assessment cycle as part of their professional responsibilities and commitment to institutional and program missions. Each student and administrative support area should also explore ways that students can be involved in the process.

Primary responsibility for implementing assessment plans are at the dean and director level, with general oversight responsibility at the reporting dean or vice-president level. The office of Assessment, Planning, and Research provides support.

C. Unit of Analysis

Each dean or director determines what department or departments constitute an assessment group. Grouping similar departments together will expedite the process of assessment and help ensure that the system of assessment becomes sustainable and institutionalized.

Assessment in student and administrative support areas are built from the basic functions of the department (or principal job duties of the administrator). The three primary areas of assessment in the support are:

1. Efficiency and effectiveness of processes (e.g., student registration, internal financial control system, audit reports, institutional research support)
2. Satisfaction of students and public served
3. And satisfaction of college employees served

D. Timeline

Assessment is an ongoing process. Over a period of two or three years, all departments or an aggregate of departments are working within the assessment cycle. Each year, various aggregates of student and administrative support areas are engaged in developing assessment plans, implementing and analyzing assessment findings, and/or the development and assessment of improvement projects based on results. Following is a conceptual timeline, tracing a single department through the cycle. For some departments and assessments this timeline may be accelerated.

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. Departmental-Level Mission Statement and Basic Functions

A departmental-level mission is a brief statement that is a description of the basic functions of the department. The description states the services provided and/or the products expected by the department. It includes a description of the principal groups served (students, public, and college employees). The departmental statement directly links to the section of the college mission concerned with student and administrative support. The statement is based on the principal responsibilities of the dean or director as provided in the official job description. Typically, departments have six or fewer basic functions. These statements form the basis of the assessment plan for the department.

For example, a basic function of the payroll offices is to provide accurate and timely (service) payroll checks (product) to the employees of the college. The office answers questions (service) concerning payroll from college employees and provides documentation (product) concerning the payroll to the North Carolina Community College System. Functions have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions (i.e., the number of checks process and the satisfaction of employees with the payroll process).

B. Departmental Assessment Audit

The assessment audit has two parts.

How functions are supported. The audit identifies how the basic functions are addressed. The audit is limited to the most important activities that advance departmental functions. It answers the question, if this is the department's function, what are the ways this function advanced? For example, a research office may list support of instructional and administrative decision making as a basic function. The office does this by providing standard reports of data, conducting and analyzing intuitional research studies, and making recommendations for action.

A basic function of the finance department is to implement and monitor a system for budget development and internal financial controls. The department does this by involving the college and Board of Trustees in the development of a budget, providing and reviewing the

expenditures of the college, and by completing and cooperating with financial reports and audits.

How activities to advance functions are evaluated. The audit enumerates indicators of quantity or quality in the department for the various functions and stating the ways activities to forward basic functions are evaluated. For example, the information technologies department may assess the level of technology equipment on the campus and then executive a plan to distribute and redistribute technology where it is needed most. An admissions office may keep track of the number of application processed. Both departments may elect to distribute a satisfaction survey to students or employees to gauge perceptions of the quality of services. There may also be state or national benchmark data or professional literature that could be used to measure both quantitative and quality output. A department could also examine any measure over time to provide trend analysis

Conducting the assessment audit with departmental staff generates conversation about which departmental functions are or should be most supported. Conversation could also center on the adequacy of assessment systems in place, and where expansion of assessment should be considered.

Here is a list of typical types of assessments used by student and administrative support departments. Both assessment method and types of indicators produced by the method are listed.

Statistical reports, departmental records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people served • Number of purchase orders completed • Inventory of age of equipment or facilities • Number of reports completed • Number of service request completed • Number of positions filled • Profit from auxiliary enterprises
Case studies and analyses	Findings from review of processes
Audits and analysis from outside agencies	Number of audit exceptions
Benchmarks from industry or other colleges	Comparative numbers of various indicators
Employee and student surveys	Level of satisfaction on various dimension of service
Focus groups	
Interviews	Suggestions for improvement

C. Development of Assessment Plan

The assessment plan enumerates which departmental functions will be measured, providing details of when, where and how. After the departmental assessment 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. It is not necessary or practical to measure everything, for all services, all the time. A carefully selected sample provides information suited for both efficiency documentation and planning for improvement. A sample approach will produce a system that is sustainable over time.

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

- Which departmental functions will you assess and why?
- Which students or employees will you assess and how many?
- How often will the data be collected?
- What measures will you use?
- What assessments are already being used that could become part of the assessment plan?
- What assessment tools are the best fit for your department functions?

Here is an example from an institutional research office.

Departmental Function	Who will be assessed?	When will they be assessed?	What is the assessment approach?	What is the measurement?
Coordination of state and federal reporting	Cooperating offices	Every other spring	Survey and focus group	Overall satisfaction and specific items on survey Content analysis of focus group comments
Institutional research reports	Director and dean levels	Survey instrument with distribution of survey (on-going)	Survey Departmental records	Overall satisfaction and specific items Report count

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 departmental outcome and the assessment strategy to inform that outcome
2. Presentation of findings
3. Discussion of implications and recommendations

D. Context

For each departmental-level outcome provide the following:

- Objective—restate the departmental function
- Activities—identify the major activities that describe how this function is advanced
- Assessments/Measures—discuss the multiple assessment measures used to inform the 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 departmental function or objective. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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.