

Assessment Manual

Office of Assessment Planning and Research

www.isothermal.edu

286 ICC Loop Rd
Spindale, NC 28160

828.286.3636

instassessment@isothermal.edu



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Introduction

Isothermal Community College's mission statement, "To improve life through learning," is broad enough to encompass the many learning needs of Rutherford and Polk Counties and defined enough to allow the College to grow and thrive for fifty years. The phrase "to improve" sets the tone of continually striving to discover and meet the learning needs of the community. The mission is focused on "life"—the lives of the learners and of those who serve them and learn with them. Last, "through learning" refers to:

- A process of learners and teachers reflecting on the work completed and acknowledging the struggle involved in reaching for goals
- A learning environment that supports students' efforts to attain their goal(s) through a commitment to service and innovation
- A place for area residents to experience the performing arts, celebrate local and international music, attend job fairs and competitions, be enriched, and celebrate successes
- A commitment to engage in the hard work of formative assessment

Glossary

Assessment: The College's Model for Assessment of Instructional Areas (2006) states that "Assessment is an ongoing, systematic process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making expectations explicit...; setting appropriate [thresholds]...; gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches [the predetermined threshold]; and using the resulting information to...improve performance" (p. 1). For service areas, assessment is a similar ongoing process focused on identifying, measuring, analyzing, and modifying Program Goals. At the institutional level, assessment gauges the extent to which the institution achieves its mission and creates a common understanding of quality and improvement.

Assessment Tools: Gathers evidence about student learning based on student performance that demonstrates the learning itself. Examples in the classroom are written assignments, classroom assignments, presentations, test results, projects, logs, portfolios, and direct observations. Examples in other areas are service logs, sign in sheets, satisfaction surveys, and outside audits

Educational Programs: The College has designated two different reporting units that use different forms: (1) Educational Programs and Service and Support Programs. An Educational Program is each educational degree (including associates, certificates, and diplomas) offered at the College. Educational Programs and Service & Support Programs use different forms for SACSCOC reporting purposes. The forms' significant difference is between the use of "goals" for service and "outcomes" for academics.

General Education Competencies: Students who complete Isothermal programs are expected to be able to function effectively as contributing citizens of our society. Our programs, regardless of their content areas, are designed to enable graduates to achieve the general education competencies. The required skills are technology, presentation, written communication, information literacy, quantitative and critical thinking. Competencies are evaluated at both the institutional and program level.

Service & Support Programs: The College has designated seven reporting units

- Academic Development
 - English and Math
 - Math Tutoring
 - Writing Center
- Administrative Services
 - Bookstore
 - Business Office
 - Human Resources
 - Information Technology
 - Plant Operations and Maintenance
 - Print Shop
 - WNCW
- Advising and Success Center
 - Advising Center
 - Counseling
 - Disability Services
 - Health Sciences Advising
 - New Century Scholars
 - Testing Services
- Community and Workforce Education and Institutional Advancement
 - College and Career Readiness/Basic Skills
 - Continuing Education
 - Customized Training and Development
 - Grant Writing
 - Performing Arts and Conference Center
 - Polk Center
 - Small Business Center
- Institutional Effectiveness and other support services
 - Assessment, Planning, and Research
 - Distance Learning
 - Library
- Office of the President and TALC
 - Marketing and Community Relations
 - President's Office
 - TALC Leadership
- Student Services

- Enrollment Management
- Financial Aid
- Records Office
- Student Activities

Important Annual Due Dates

PSLO Collector—due every semester by faculty checkout

Assessment Data Reporting—due by December 20th each year

Assessment Conferences—take place each spring

Process for Program Assessment

1. Lead instructors submit their Assessment Data prior to Faculty Checkout.
2. Institutional Assessment compiles the Program Assessment Report and verifies all necessary components.
3. Lead instructors verifies that the Program Assessment Report is accurate and complete.
4. Institutional Assessment verifies that the report is complete and archives it on the Institutional Assessment shared drive.
5. Weigh the pig. Feed the pig. Weigh the pig.
6. Continuously Improve

SACSCOC Expectations

Institutional effectiveness is an area of the institution that is closely monitored in the reaffirmation of accreditation process. According to SACSCOC (2017), "At the heart of SACSCOC's philosophy of accreditation, the concept of quality enhancement assumes that each member institution is engaged in ongoing improvement of its programs and services and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission" (p. 4).

The phrase "ongoing improvement" assumes that a college will continuously evaluate the effectiveness of its services and programs and then make changes based on the results of those assessments to provide the highest quality of education and support for its students, who deserve no less than our best. The SACSCOC standards related to institutional effectiveness are listed below.

7.1 – The institution engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that

- a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and
- b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.

7.2 – The institution has a QEP that

- a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes;
- b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies;
- c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success;
- d) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and
- e) includes a plan to assess achievement.

7.3 – The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved.

8.1 – The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution’s mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success.

8.2 – The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

- a) Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.
- b) Student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs.
- c) Academic and student services that support student success.

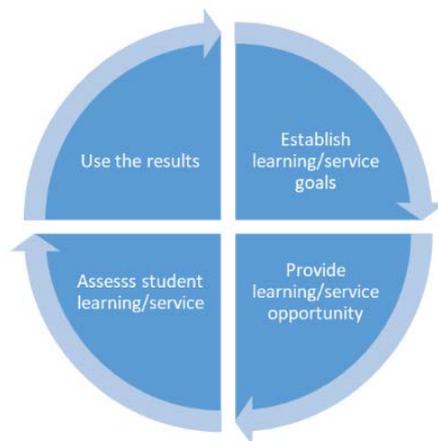


Figure 1: Assessment Cycle

Suskie, L. (2018). *Assessing student learning: A common sense approach* (3rd ed). Jossey-Bass

Sources of Data

Course-level Assessment

Student learning outcomes are often assessed in individual courses. There are numerous methods of assessing student learning in a classroom setting, including the following:

- Speeches
- Written papers
- Test questions
- Student portfolios
- Standardized exams
- Consider using a rubric or other marking guide to provide guidance and consistency for multiple instructors. Be sure that the assessment measures the specific learning outcome. For example, a standardized certification exam might contain 100 questions, only 10 of which pertain to a specific student learning outcome. Use student achievement only on those 10 questions when assessing the extent to which students achieved that outcome.

Service-level Assessment

Service and administrative areas also have diverse methods of data collection to choose from based on the specific outcomes. There are numerous methods of collecting data on services including the following:

- Surveys
- Interviews/focus groups
- Sign-in logs
- Audit findings
- Before and after reflection
- Be sure that the assessment method is specific to the service outcome. Avoid over-surveying whenever possible. For example, consider including questions on a larger survey that is going out campus-wide rather than each unit sending its own, individual survey to the same population.

Performance Measures

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) publishes performance measures annually that include basic skills student progress, student success in college-level English and math courses, first-year progress, college transfer performance, and others.

As part of the assessment process, SACSCOC expects the College to identify thresholds of acceptability (minimum target) for these measures of student achievement. While these measures are not “student learning outcomes,” they are metrics of student achievement which need to be monitored and evaluated by the institution and may be tracked as program outcomes for appropriate areas.

Conclusion

Institutional effectiveness at Isothermal Community College takes on a variety of forms. In addition to the activities that take place at the unit level, the entire College engages in ongoing strategic planning as well as

assessment of student achievement measures including the NCCCS Performance Measures and National Student Clearinghouse completion rates. Assessment is the responsibility of all areas of the institution. Rather than an afterthought, improving our service delivery, administrative operations, and learning experience for students should be at the top of our priority list. The Office of Assessment Planning and Research is always available to work with departments collectively or with individuals who have questions about the process.

Contacts

Director of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation/SACSCOC Liaison

828.395.4194

ADM 215-B

Institutional Assessment Coordinator

828.395.1480

ADM 216

"Effective institutions demonstrate a commitment to principles of continuous improvements, based on a systematic and documented process of assessing institutional performance with respect to mission in all aspects of the institution."

--Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2018

