| Outcomes Assessment Essentials: Assessment Audit	No. 3 ©September 2011

Before your department develops assessment tools from scratch, conduct an "Assessment Audit". Determine how your department or program is already engaged in assessment. Barbara Walvoord, a professor of English at the University of Notre Dame, who writes about assessment, understands that faculty are already assessing student learning though we may not be reporting the results in any formal way beyond grades, or our methods might not currently meet the standards of accrediting bodies. So after articulating learning goals, faculty should compile a list of how they are already assessing those goals.
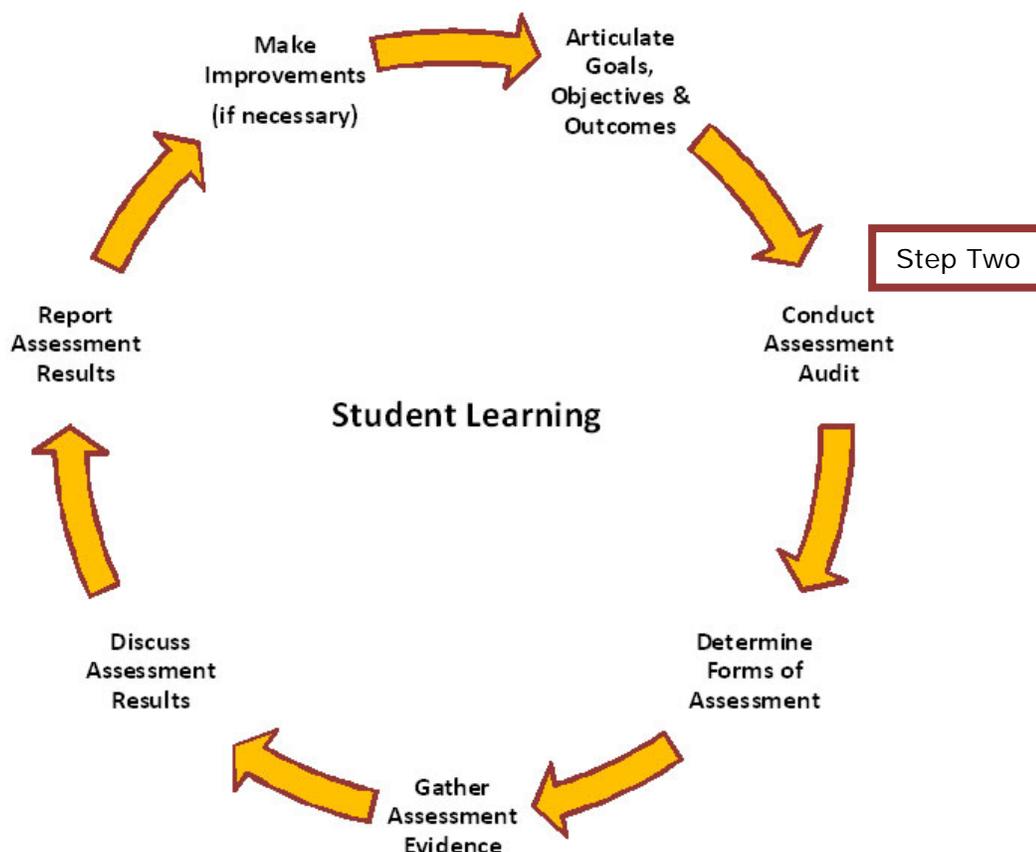
As Barbara Walvoord writes, "Wherever you are gathering information about student learning, even if it is not being used very well, even if no one has called it assessment, include it now, because it is a potential site or building block for assessment."[1] In short, departments will save time, if they make the time to determine what they are already doing.[2]

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[1] Barbara Walvoord, *Assessment: Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 12.

[2] The assessment audit is referred to as a situation audit Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* (Philadelphia, 2007), 22. See http://www.msche.org/publications/SLA_Book_0808080728085320.pdf

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Before departments begin conducting an assessment audit, faculty must have decided upon learning goals they plan to assess at the course and/or program level. Upon developing the learning goals, create a table like this:

Department Assessment Audit					
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
Learning Goals	**Courses:** Which courses or extra-curricular activities allow students to learn, practice, or be assessed for the learning goal?	**Learning Strategies:** How do students learn?	**Assessment Strategies:** How do you know students have achieved the learning goals?	**Desired Levels of Learning:** What are the levels of proficiency for each assessment? (e.g. excellent, competent, inadequate)	**What needs to be done to create an Outcomes Assessment Plan?**
Goal 1 Dedicate one row to each goal. **Tip:** If you have multiple courses and/or extra-curricular activities that can achieve a single learning goal, create separate rows for each of the courses or activities as a subset of the learning goal.	List all courses or extracurricular activities in which the learning goal is taught, practiced, and/or assessed.	List activities that students engage in to achieve learning goals (e.g. reading, lab experiments, performance, and essay-writing). In listing activities, do not limit yourself to what you believe can be assessed.	List the assignments, projects, etc. in which learning goals are assessed. Identify the assessment as direct or indirect; course-embedded, add-on, or value-added.[3] Remember Barbara Walvoord's tip: "Wherever you are gathering information about student learning, even if it is informal, even if it is not written down, even if it is not being used very well, even if no one has called it assessment, include it now, because it is a potential site or building block for assessment." (*Assessment Clear and Simple*, 2004, 55)	List any rubrics, test blueprinting, etc. already in use by faculty that measure the learning goal. List any proficiency levels or criteria that have already been identified for these assessments.	Evaluate the results (see below). List what still needs to be done.

A departmental assessment audit could also be accomplished at the course or instructor level, and then the results collated into a single table. Each faculty member simply fills in the information for the courses that s/he teaches.

At some point, it is useful for colleagues to sit around a table and discuss. After all, while outcomes assessment may be required by public stakeholders and accrediting bodies, we can find motivation in our desire to improve student learning and develop as teachers and scholars.

Evaluate the Results

Barbara Walvoord recommends that upon completing the audit, faculty evaluate the results and look for the following features:[4]

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[3] See "Outcomes Assessment Essentials No. 2: Types of Assessment Measures" for a discussion of direct/indirect and course-embedded.

[4] For the direct quotations and inspiration for many of the ideas found in the questions, see Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 59-61. Questions 8 and 9 are relevant to the dialogue about outcomes assessment at Bloomsburg University.

1. During the process of completing the audit, you may discover that the learning goals (**column 1**) need to be revised. Do the learning strategies (**column 3**) or assessment strategies (**column 4**) point to a goal(s) that has not been explicitly stated but important, or essential, to the program?

2. In looking at the details of what is occurring at the course level, "… are each of the goals being taught?"

3. "Are skills and knowledge being developed progressively throughout the curriculum?"

4. With courses that have multiple sections taught by several faculty, a variety of learning strategies (**column 3**) and assessments (**column 4**) may be used, which are equally appropriate. So, do the variety of strategies and assessments promise to fulfill the learning goals?

5. A bit more problematical is when learning goals differ between sections in which consistency is essential because the course is part of a sequence (e.g. health sciences). If so, will all students "experience a sensible sequence of learning goals within the curriculum"? Barbara Walvoord maintains that "assessment need not impose a cookie-cutter uniformity." She continues, "It is possible to bring sections of a course closer together in terms of *learning goals* and still have a wide variety of *course content and teaching methods*, according to each teacher's choice." At Bloomsburg University, learning goals are listed in the master syllabus that must be approved by the department, college, and university curriculum committees. Subsequently, the minimum learning goals are agreed upon to ensure that a "sensible sequence" is not disrupted no matter what section a student enrolls. What is more, faculty can include learning goals in their sections that go beyond what the department has identified in its master syllabus or in its outcomes assessment plans.

6. Look for assessment strategies (**column 4**), that is assignments, "whose results yield evidence of how well students have reached one or more of the departmental goals" and useful to outcomes assessment.

7. Have you missed some additional sources of assessment evidence? Explore the list of Indirect Evidence of Student Learning (See "Outcomes Assessment Essentials No. 2: Types of Assessment Measures"), and you will find a number of items that a department might find useful depending upon the learning goals it plans to measure. Here are some examples and the university offices that might have the data:
   a. Aggregated Student Evaluations (Institutional Research)
   b. Aggregated Grades (Office of the Registrar)
   c. Student Job Placement Rates (Career Development Center)
   d. Employer and Alumni Surveys (Alumni Affairs, Career Development Center)
   e. GRE, LSAT, etc. (Office of Graduate Studies and Research)
   f. Graduate School Acceptance Rates
   g. NSSE-FSSE Results (Office of Assessment and Planning)
   h. Retention and Graduation Rates (Institutional Research)

> ### Questions for BU Faculty to Consider

8. Will your program's learning goals help the **university fulfill its educational mission**? Not all learning goals within a department or program must fulfill the complete mission statements at the college or university level.

9. If the course seeks **general education points**, are the learning goals clearly relevant to the University's Goals for General Education Student Learning Outcomes and related VALUE rubric "elements" (see below for more explanation)? The General Education Council has developed a list of guidelines. When they made these guidelines available to the university community in early September 2011, they wrote, "it is a work in progress. Please tell the General Education Council about any concerns that you may have." See General Education Guidelines available through

the TALE website. TALE will maintain a link to the most recent version as it is made available.

**Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
Goals for General Education Student Learning Outcomes[5]**

1. Communicate effectively in writing, oral presentation, and visual argument.
2. Find, evaluate, and ethically use information using appropriate technology.
3. Apply critical analysis, quantitative reasoning, and problem solving skills.
4. Apply knowledge from the humanities and other disciplines to analyze: the implications of diversity among human groups, their histories, their cultures, and, the plurality of human experiences.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of natural sciences principles, concepts, and methods.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of social sciences principles, concepts, and methods.
7. Apply knowledge from the arts and humanities to analyze, evaluate, or participate in the artistic and literary traditions of our diverse world.
8. Demonstrate basic communication skills in a second language.
9. Participate in physical activity and evaluate the consequences of health decisions.
10. Exhibit responsible citizenship.

About the VALUE Rubrics[6] (Association of American Colleges and Universities)

VALUE: Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education

As part of AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, the VALUE project seeks to contribute to the national dialogue on assessment of college student learning. … The VALUE project builds on a philosophy of learning assessment that privileges authentic assessment of student work and shared understanding of student learning outcomes on campuses over reliance on standardized tests administered to samples of students outside of their required courses. The result of this philosophy has been the collaborative development of 15 rubrics by teams of faculty and academic professionals on campuses from across the country.

VALUE assumes that:
- to achieve a high-quality education for all students, valid assessment data are needed to guide planning, teaching, and improvement;
- colleges and universities seek to foster and assess numerous essential learning outcomes beyond those addressed by currently available standardized tests;
- learning develops over time and should become more complex and sophisticated as students move through their curricular and cocurricular educational pathways toward a degree;
- good practice in assessment requires multiple assessments, over time; well-planned electronic portfolios provide opportunities to collect data from multiple assessments across a broad range of learning outcomes while guiding student learning and building self-assessment capabilities;
- e-portfolios and assessment of work in them can inform programs and institutions on progress in achieving expected goals.

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[5] http://www.bloomu.edu/policies_procedures/3612
[6] http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm

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The VALUE Rubrics can be downloaded at
http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/index_p.cfm?CFID=33594730&CFTOKEN=78813781
You will be asked to provide your email before downloading.

The Learning Outcomes for the Development of VALUE Rubrics:

Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Inquiry and analysis (see this rubric below)
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility
- Civic knowledge and engagement – local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative and Applied Learning
- Integrative and applied learning

The "elements" referred to in the GEC Guidelines are listed in column 1.

One of the 15 VALUE Rubrics

Tip: If you are either developing rubrics to grade assignments or to do course-embedded outcomes assessment, you might find the criteria language in columns 2-5 useful. See the AACU's website for more rubrics and copyright.

Inquiry and Analysis VALUE Rubric[7]

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3	2	Benchmark 1
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Topic selection	Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of the topic.	Identifies a focused and manageable/doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.
Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views	Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of	Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of	Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Presents information from irrelevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.

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[7] http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/InquiryAnalysis.cfm Accessed on 18 September 2011

	view/approaches.	view/approaches.		
Design Process	All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized from across disciplines or from relevant subdisciplines.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed, however, more subtle elements are ignored or unaccounted for.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are missing, incorrectly developed, or unfocused.	Inquiry design demonstrates a misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework.
Analysis	Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities.	Lists evidence, but it is not organized and/or is unrelated to focus.
Conclusions	States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.	States a conclusion focused solely on the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to the inquiry findings.	States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.	States an ambiguous, illogical, or unsupportable conclusion from inquiry findings.

In the 2 September 2011 GEC Guidelines, these two elements were used as an example of how Student Learning Objectives could be clearly linked to one of the General Education Goals and the Related VALUE Rubric.

Be sure to consult the General Education Guidelines for more details on how departments should apply for General Education Points. This handout is not explicitly intended to explain the General Education Guidelines; it is intended to assist faculty in developing and revising outcomes assessment plans.

To summarize, evaluating the results of your department's audit, will help you identify assessment that is already occurring. From this point, determine what assessment measures are ready to become part of a plan, which ones need revision, and what your department might still need to develop. Consult the TALE's Outcomes Assessment Webpage for a variety of sources.

Written and sources gathered by L. M. Stallbaumer-Beishline, PhD
Associate Professor of History
TALE Director
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania