

ASSESSMENT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE CONTENT STANDARDS WERE DEVELOPED BY THE ACPA COMMISSION FOR ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE IN CONSULTATION WITH DIVERSE CONSTITUENCIES • ALICE A. MITCHELL, CHAIR • SEPTEMBER, 2006

The Context for Assessment Skills and Knowledge Content Standards

Over the course of the past two decades, the public, legislative bodies, parents and students have shown increased interest in fiscal and learning accountability in higher education. Initiatives such as The Student Learning Imperative (American College Personnel Association, 1996), The National Study on Student Engagement (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2004), Learning Reconsidered (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004), Greater Expectations (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002), the Measuring Up series (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004), Declining by Degrees (Hersh & Merrow, 2005) and more recently College Learning for the New Global Community (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007) are examples of criticisms and higher education's response to better identify and measure college outcomes.

In student affairs, the articulation and assessment of student learning has been especially challenging given the complex psychosocial and cognitive constructs that are the hallmarks of our work with students. Messy constructs such as leadership, citizenship, appreciation for diversity, critical and ethical judgement, and a host of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences present unique measurement issues. These constructs are found not only in student affairs but also in academic affairs where the constructs may include effective writing

and speaking, team work, critical thinking and problem solving ability.

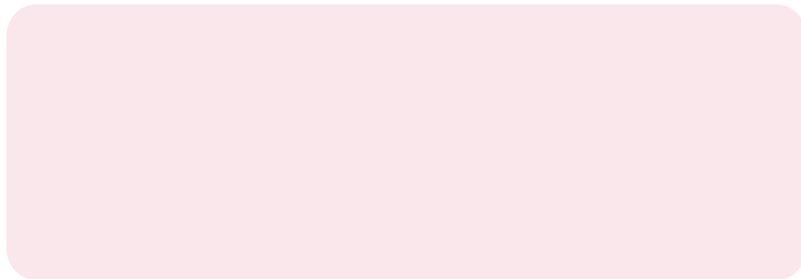
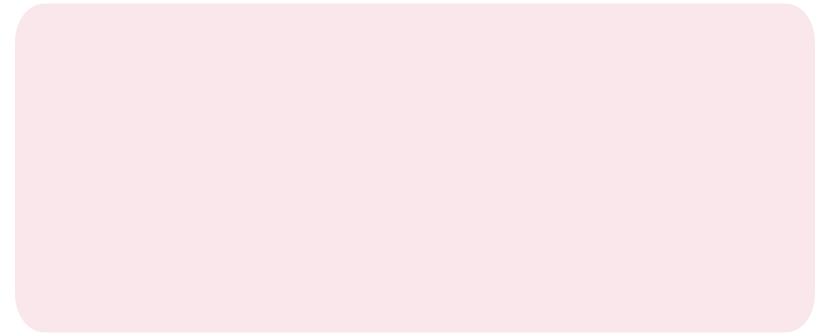
While student affairs graduates are taught basic research and assessment skills in their programs, many more seasoned professionals

used in the context of educational accountability, these areas of knowledge and skill are termed “content standards.” Phrased conversationally, content standards describe “what you need to know.” That is, what do student affairs professionals need to know in order to do assessment?

Proficiency standards complement content standards. Proficiency standards articulate the degree of expertise of the practitioner in a given area of content. Again phrased conversationally, proficiency standards describe “how well do you know it; how well can you do it.” Phrased another way, how well do student affairs professionals know various areas of assessment skill and knowledge?

The primary focus of this discussion paper is to identify the appropriate knowledge content areas all student affairs practitioners need in order to engage in meaningful and useful assessment. The identification of appropriate proficiency levels for each content area is outside the scope of this project. However, it follows that once content areas are established and generally agreed upon, a discussion of proficiency in each area will and should follow.

Developed in consultation with student affairs professionals from across the Association, the Assessment Skills and Knowledge (ASK) content areas are:



Ability to design a qualitative assessment plan including learning objectives, conceptual approach (e.g., phenomenological, case study, and so on), selection of appropriate qualitative data collection techniques, and analysis plan.

Ability to identify assumptions related to focus of the assessment as well

Content Standard 3: Selection of Data Collection and Management Methods

Ability to identify the types of data/information needed to perform the assessment. This includes understanding the benefits and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative data and exploring what data already exist and do not need to be collected. These data decisions would then determine which method (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method) would be used to collect data.

Ability to identify indirect and direct methods (Maki, 2004) of assessment as well as to use intentional informal assessment (Love and Guthrie, 1999) when warranted.

Ability to select methods of data collection and analysis appropriate to answering the questions posed by the assessment project.

Ability to establish assessment and data collection procedures and processes that are manageable, appropriate, and cost-effective for one's work function/division/department.

Ability to choose and implement appropriate data collection techniques, including but not limited to the following:

- (a) Surveys
- (b) Focus groups
- (c) Interview
- (d) Document review

Ability to choose appropriate sample size for the assessment depending on assumptions underlying the assessment plan (such as whether the results are intended to be generalized).

Ability to collect, manipulate and manage databases when part of large institutional databases or smaller, functional area specific databases.

Content Standard 4: Assessment Instruments

Ability to use assessment instruments with rigor appropriate to their intended uses.

Ability to identify strengths and weaknesses of established assessment instruments and select most appropriate instruments for the desired measurement target. Those strengths and weaknesses could include

Ability to determine the manner in which participants with disabilities will utilize any assessment instruments selected. That determination could include consultation with institutional professionals in disability support.

Ability to review an instrument for inclusive and accessible language likely to be viewed as informed and respectful by those for whom use of the instrument is intended.

Content Standard 5: Surveys Used for Assessment Purposes

Ability to evaluate and create a rigorous survey with focus on effective question wording, effective survey format for the intended sample population (which may include participants with disabilities, members of various cultural groups, and so on), appropriate administration method, along with ability to achieve appropriate response rate.

Ability to use selected skills in sampling statistics to include types of sampling (random, stratified, cluster, systematic, and so on) as well as sample size estimation, variance estimation, confidence intervals, ratio and regression estimation, and appropriate analytic responses to non-responses and missing data.

Content Standard 6: Interviews and Focus Groups Used for Assessment Purposes

Ability to determine when individual or focus group interviews are appropriate data collection techniques.

Ability to identify representative cohorts reflecting institutional demographics.

Ability to appropriately identify various cultural groups included in the research, recognizing regional differences in preferred terminology.

Ability to plan the cohorts so that important within-group differences are considered among larger cultural groupings, such as perspectives that may be held by members of specific cultural groups (e.g., Chinese Americans) that may be different from the perspectives of the larger group (Asian Americans).

Ability to organize and conduct effective individual and focus group interviews with attention to appropriate selection and recruitment of participants, interview logistics (location, room set-up, equipment), and interview structure (introduction/warm-up, content questions, wrap-up, closing).

Ability to develop appropriate interview questions with consideration of wording, type, sequencing, and number.

Ability to develop rapport with participants, to listen attentively, to follow-up with appropriate questions and points of clarification, to attend to nuances of group discussion (e.g., participant involvement, conversation dominance, and so on) and to take useful field notes.

Ability to create a moderator's guide and to select and train moderators,

as necessary, paying particular attention to the knowledge and skills required to conduct individual interviews and discussion groups.

Ability to effectively analyze collected data using techniques of analysis appropriate to qualitative methods.

Content Standard 7: Analysis

Ability to analyze and interpret data using the appropriate univariate and multivariate statistical techniques and appropriate software to perform those analyses

Ability to analyze and interpret data using methods appropriate to qualitative inquiry (e.g., constant comparative analysis, ethnography, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, etc.). Ability to use software appropriate to these analyses.

Ability to establish standards of rigor, trustworthiness, and authenticity to assessment projects using qualitative methods.

Ability to aggregate and disaggregate data to identify patterns of student achievement and development.

Ability to interpret the data in ways that are understandable to both technical and non-technical audiences.

Ability to distinguish between statistical significance and practical significance.

Content Standard 8: Benchmarking

When available, the ability to identify national, regional or local programs or sources of benchmarking data for program, department, or institutional use.

Ability to use benchmarking data for strategic planning purposes.

Ability to evaluate benchmarking programs and determine advisability of institutional participation.

Ability to create and use institutional benchmark programs when those do not exist in a specific functional or topical area.

Content Standard 9: Program Review and Evaluation

Ability to implement a program evaluation/program review.

Ability to use CAS Standards or other related standards such as APA for counseling centers, to regularly review and improve programs and services within a given institution.

Content Standard 10: Assessment Ethics

An understanding of the purpose and role of an Institutional Review Board and appropriate procedures for human subjects.

Ability to appropriately determine when and where data and findings should be promulgated in a way that respects confidentiality and/or anonymity of the participants.

Ability to interpret and apply FERPA guidelines in assessment and evaluation projects.

Content Standard 11: Effective Reporting and Use of Results

Ability to develop an appropriate written report of findings that recognizes the intended audience(s) and stakeholders in terms of sophistication, areas of sensitivity, and level of detail likely to be effective and helpful

Ability to effectively communicate results with use of visual support such as graphs, charts, and/or PowerPoint that recognizes the intended audience(s) and stakeholders in terms of sophistication, areas of sensitivity, and level of detail likely to be effective and helpful.

Ability to apply results to improve programs and services. Ability to discover and question assumptions underlying current practices (“double loop learning” as described by Argyris & Schon, 1974 and discussed in Love & Estanek, 2004)

Ability to effect change with the assessment results.

Content Standard 12: Politics of Assessment

Ability to determine political risks that may apply to assessment results and the audiences likely to be adversely affected by findings.

Ability to use assessment in the context of strategic planning, budgeting, unit or institutional decision-making including use of assessment to effect changes when warranted.

Ability to identify the context/institutional factors that shape the need for the assessment.

Ability to report assessment findings with an awareness of the political context for those results such as who will receive the results, the format in which the results should be reported, and timing of the reporting.

Ability to exercise personal and professional maturity, good judgment, and critical thinking skills in the reporting and use of assessment results.

Ability to identify, recognize, and overcome barriers to performing assessment and incorporating assessment results into policy and practice

Content Standard 13: Assessment Education

Ability to educate others about the goals, needs, and techniques of assessment.

Ability to work with educators across the institution on shared outcomes. These educators might well include those in student affairs and those in academic affairs.

The ASK standards provide a framework for the assessment knowledge and skills in which student affairs professionals need to be proficient in order to foster learning.

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