**Student Affairs Assessment Strategy – Dr. Phil Wood**

McMaster University is highly committed to the success of our students and excellence in education. Purpose driven assessment within Student Affairs is designed to support this commitment by having each unit develop its own set of strategies for examining student learning and development within the services, programs and events of the unit. Our goal is to develop an annual reporting structure for units to identify significant accomplishments and successful outcomes and to use assessment as a means of identifying and improving the quality of the services, programs and events that are offered moving forward.

To this end, Student Affairs has invested in the services of Campus Labs, the leading platform and service provider for assessment in higher education. Campus Labs is the only specialized, comprehensive assessment program that combines data collection, reporting, organization, and campus-wide integration and they provide the support we need to effectively assess our work. I encourage all staff within Student Affairs to learn more about the Campus Lab services and tools by working with a member of our Assessment Committee.

The division of Student Affairs at the University of McMaster mission is to help faculty and staff to articulate academic and student affairs programs in terms of student abilities, course and program outcomes, the criteria by which we would assess student abilities, and finally how we would assess if those abilities have been retained.

**Introduction**

This document is intended to assist Student Affairs staff with identifying and organizing learning outcomes based assessment and evaluation projects to achieve the goals of developing a successful assessment program and establishing a culture of assessment at McMaster. A culture of assessment means all units within Student Affairs understand and meet the expectation of regularly gathering and analyzing information that is used for continuous improvement.

Assessment works best when:

1. The program or service being assessed has clearly stated purposes (purpose driven)
2. The assessment is focused on outcomes and the experiences that led to those outcomes
3. The assessment is connected to broader departmental goals and objectives that promote change and improvement.

The most critical step in the assessment process is for the data that is gathered to be analyzed and applied toward improvement in the programs and services being offered. This template is intended to assist with this process and support can also be sought from the Student Affairs Assessment Committee. Contact Nathan Cooper, Chair of the committee (ncooper@mcmaster.ca) for assistance.

McMaster University Mission Statement

At McMaster, our purpose is the discovery, communication, and preservation of knowledge. In our teaching, research, and scholarship, we are committed to creativity, innovation, and excellence. We value integrity, quality, and teamwork in everything we do. We inspire critical thinking, personal growth, and a passion for learning. We serve the social, cultural, and economic needs of our community and our society.

Basic Definitions

Assessment is an effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional or agency effectiveness [3]. It should include student learning outcomes, client satisfaction, complying with professional standards, and comparisons with other institution [1].

Assessment is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting and using information to increase students’ learning and development. It includes discussions about what should be assessed and how information will be used, not just the hands-on testing of students [2] Erwin (1991, p15).

Assessment strategies vary and, when combined, offer a broader view of what students are learning as a result of participating in a program or service, in addition to measuring the effectiveness of the program or service.
The Value of Assessment

It is important to understand the significance of assessment at the local program level as well as how it links programs and services to the values and goals of the broader division and institution. Measuring activities promotes alignment with the goals and objectives set by each unit and promotes an enhanced focus on the student experience. Student Affairs values regular assessment for the purposes of:

- Continuous improvement
- Alignment and accountability
- Success and satisfaction
Assessment is a priority within Student Affairs at McMaster University. As “partners in learning”, we influence students’ development and learning through our programs and services. The Student Affairs assessment strategy is based on student learning outcomes and is focused on measuring the result or change in a student’s cognitive, affective or behavioural skills from having participated in the program or service being assessed. We take the approach of ‘purpose driven assessment’ which means we are clear in establishing a purpose or goal for each program and service we offer that is connected to the achievement of divisional and institutional goals. We then measure the effectiveness of the program or service in the context of what it helped students learn.

Student Affairs has adopted the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes (CAS FALDO’s) as our guide for developing specific program and service student learning outcomes at McMaster.

**What Are Student Learning Outcomes?**

“Statements indicating what a participant (usually students) will know, think or be able to do as a result of an event, activity, program, etc..” – Campus Labs (Assessment slideshow, 2010)

*Components of a Learning Outcome include:*

- **Audience (who)** – who is expected to achieve the identified outcome?
- **Behaviour (what)** – what is the audience expected to know or do as a result of participating?
- **Condition (how)** – under what conditions will the learning occur?
- **Degree (how much)** – to what level will the change in behaviour or cognitive knowledge occur, or how much improvement will be measured in their performance as a result of participating?

*Example:* Students attending the Note-Taking Strategies workshop will be able to implement 3 new strategies that could improve the effectiveness of their note-taking skills.

**Applying the CAS FALDO’s**

Using the six identified domains of learning outcomes as measurements of student success, we can assess the programs and services we offer to ensure they promote student learning and development in a meaningful way. The domains are also connected to the higher goals of our institution and the role Student Affairs plays in achieving these goals. The CAS FALDO’s can be found in Appendix I.
Institutional Goals of Higher Education

1. **Retention** – student retention or persistence is often used as a measurement of success when looking statistically at how many students enroll at an institution and persist through to the completion of their under-graduate degree, and in some cases, move on to a graduate degree.

2. **Academic Achievement** – McMaster University is known for its commitment to research and standards of excellence in academic achievement. It is our goal to help students achieve these standards within their intellectual growth.

3. **Student Growth and Development** – it has been well-researched that students develop in a holistic way and their academic learning is influenced by their emotional, social, physical and spiritual development. Student Affairs is responsible for creating an environment within the institution in which this development can happen in a positive and supportive way.

Learning Outcomes and Program Outcomes

Learning outcomes and program outcomes are the reason or *purpose* for delivering all of the services, programs and resources we offer. We are intentional about what we want students to either learn or gain from the program or service and in determining this purpose, we must tie together the overall institutional mission, the Student Affairs mission and the more specific goals, objectives and outcomes set at the unit or program level.

Purpose Driven Assessment - Planning Template

**Step 1 – Know the purpose of every program / service**

When planning a program or service, consider what the purpose of is. This can be a goal or a more specific objective. Ask yourself why this program / service should be offered or what it is supposed to accomplish. This is the same stage at which you should consider how the program / service contributes
to the achievement of your departmental goals and the Student Affairs and University Mission Statements.

**Step 2 – Develop student learning outcomes for the program / service**

Refer to the FALDO’s to determine which domain the program / service relates best with and describe the outcome you intend to have happen as a result of the program / service. Ask yourself what you want students to be able to do and/or know as a result of participating in the program / service. Remember to include the:

- **Audience (who)** – who is expected to achieve the identified outcome?
- **Behaviour (what)** – what is the audience expected to know or do as a result of participating?
- **Condition (how)** – under what conditions will the learning occur?
- **Degree (how much)** – to what level will the change in behaviour or cognitive knowledge occur, or how much improvement will be measured in their performance as a result of participating?

**Step 3 – Determine what type of assessment method will yield the best results**

Some commonly used types of assessment include:

1. Tracking of participation rates
2. Rubrics / coded data
3. Satisfaction surveys
4. Focus groups
5. Benchmarking surveys
6. Outcomes assessment surveys
7. National Standards assessments
8. Internal comparisons (comparative reports)
9. Narratives (open-ended responses)

**Step 4 – Plan the assessment implementation process**

Complete the attached template, including the timeline, type of assessment and who is responsible for each element of the process. Know the purpose of the assessment to ensure the data being collected is meaningful and can identify the learning that is occurring.
1. What do you want / need to know?
2. Why do you need to know it?
   a. Will it identify the learning that is occurring as a result of the program / service?
   b. Will it identify information that can be used to improve the program / service?
3. What is the source of your data?
4. How will you use the data? What kind of reporting will be done with it?
5. Who will need to see your results?

**Step 5 – Analyze and report on the assessment data collected**

Review the results of the assessment using the same questions found in Step 4 to help guide you to identify key findings that are meaningful in relation what you measuring. The most important step in the assessment process is using the information you learned. Whether it’s making changes to improve the program / service or celebrating your success in achieving your purpose, use the data you took time to collect.

**Formal Assessment**: conceptualizing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the impact, or outcomes, of a purposeful, intentional learning event on an identified set of learners (Refer to Table 1).

**Informal Assessment** is the experience that an individual or set of individuals have when they experience an event in which learning occur (Refer to Table 1).

**Table 1: Formal Assessment [1]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assessment Stage</th>
<th>Assessment Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Health Workshop Series</td>
<td>Identifying an educational need</td>
<td>Needs assessment- administering an assessment tool, such as a survey, and analyzing data that indicate the need for change in knowledge, attitude, or behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptualizing</td>
<td>Categorizing the indentified needs; developing a scope and sequence of learning goals that illustrates who should know what, and in what general order or sequence the content should become known, as a result of the educational programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning

- Working collaboratively with others to identify who or what department will create each workshop.
- What knowledge, skills, or attitudes students should develop as a result of the workshops?
- When and where each workshop will take place
- How the learning opportunities will made known to students
- What assessment method will be used to determine level of impact
- How assessment data will be gathered

Implementing

Delivering the workshops; the format, content, and methods should respond to the learning goals, fit the learning style of the participants, and anticipate the assessment process.

Evaluating

- Developing the assessment strategy and methods.
- Providing the assessment to the learners
- Gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing data
- Developing a strategy to respond to data findings.
- Describing the data findings and proposed responses to key stakeholders.

Table 2: Informal Assessment [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assessment Stage</th>
<th>Assessment Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students move into residence halls and begin to live with roommates</td>
<td>Identifying an educational need</td>
<td>Students discover that they will need to know how to share space with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptualizing</td>
<td>Each student explicitly or implicitly determines how much space they will need and what their preferred space should be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Student Learning Outcomes**

Student learning outcomes define the goals of learning experiences; they specify what a student should be able to know, do, or value after participating in those activities. There are multiple levels of learning outcomes--- institutional, divisional, departmental, programmatic, and activity-based.

**Methods and Innovation in Assessment Practice**

Data that are perceived by internal and external stakeholders to be valid and reliable can be a powerful tool in making one’s case, or telling an institution’s performance story. The attraction of quantitative data is that they have political power because of their economy, generalizability, and perceived reliability and validity

1. Institutional indicators: Data of this type are often reported to state and federal governments and then become a matter of public record. Example crime statistics

2. Test and grading data: Student examination scores and grade point average are often utilized as an expedient set of measures of student capability or performance.

3. Large Survey Data:

4. Local survey Data:
**Assessment Practice**

The capacity to develop, implement, assess, and report student learning outcomes embraces four main areas of competency:

1. Mapping Learning
2. Integrating Learning
3. Supporting students as learners
4. Assessing the outcomes of learning

Table 3: Assessment in Practice: Practical Model for Assessment Planning [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Assessment Planning</th>
<th>Steps for Assessment Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Includes steps 1-3 listed to the right. These stages establish a foundation and provides reference for future assessment activities</td>
<td>1. Determine who within the institution, division, or department will take assessment activities; clearly communicate the dimensions of that person’s leadership role and expectations. This role is defined as “Assessment Champion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Includes steps 4 and 5 in which an infrastructure of assessment emerges.</td>
<td>2. Consider the talents, aptitudes, and areas of expertise present among colleagues and establish an assessment team to work closely with the leader and other staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Develop an internal capacity building strategy that provides staff and faculty with accurate information, introduces them to key concepts of student learning, student development, and assessment practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Create a glossary of terms that brings clarity and common understanding to concepts; Make the glossary easy to understand.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Consider and respond to potential barriers, challenges that include power dynamics, internal departmental or</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Elements of Assessment Practice

Questions that must be addressed when designing student learning outcomes;

1. What group of students
2. Who participate in
3. What activity in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Includes steps 6, 7, and 8</th>
<th>institutional politics.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where do students naturally learn on our campus and in our community? What are the sociographics of our students? What is important to them? How do they learn? Why did they choose our institution? How can we best serve and educate them? What programs, student organizations, professional honoraries, and services are already in place to promote student learning and development?</td>
<td>Map existing campus and community resources- an institutional topography of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Includes step 9 and 10</th>
<th>Data about program and personnel talent can be arranged in a matrix that illustrates program names, departmental objectives, leadership, and professional development needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Puts everything together from the previous steps.</td>
<td>Determine learning and developmental needs of students in relation to the institution’s overall student learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Determine program strengths and areas of improvement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop an assessment curriculum, including a scope and sequence that describes and illustrates desired learning techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate the quality or effectiveness of programs and institute processes of sustainability or improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) What activity, course, program, or service
5) Will be able to do, know, or value what
6) At what frequency or level of accomplishment
7) As determined by what means

This set of questions can serve as a template for beginning to bring unity in how the assessment team, and other colleagues begin to understand, think about, and describe the process of crafting student learning outcomes.

The Importance

Assessment that responds to the requests of external audiences usually focuses on simple metrics (See figure 1.0):

1) inputs (Average preadmission test scores or high school class ranks of entering students, the ratio of applicants to matriculated students, the number of national merit scholars enrolled),
2) outputs (grade point averages, retention rates, the percentage of students who graduate within some number of years of first enrollment)
3) competitive factors (student satisfaction, average starting salary of graduates, ratio of faculty to students)

These metrics primarily differentiate an institution from others in terms of audience’s value. Knowing how to assess the kind of learning that occurs in higher education is central to the ability of educators both inside and outside the classroom in the traditional academic faculty or in student affairs to their best work [1].

Why I Value Assessment - Celebrating Student Development, Learning and Success

Student Affairs units can use purpose driven assessment to demonstrate the learning and development that occurs as students integrate knowledge, skills and experiences gained by participating
in and taking advantage of the services, programs and resources offered by our units. This information can:

- Give units information about the effects of their services, programs and resources which provides a basis for on-going planning decisions
- Allow program coordinators and staff within units see how student learning and development in their particular service, program or resource relates to the learning and development of students across Student Affairs
- Help students understand what to expect from their overall experience, which further helps them assess their own progress and success
- Show community members what students are learning at McMaster and how staff support students
# Student Affairs- Assessment Project Template

*(need to create this as an on-line form)*

Project Title: _______________________________________________________________

Name of Project Administrator: ______________________________________________

Student Affairs Unit: _______________________________________________________

Start and End Date of Assessment Project: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Project</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FALDO Domain the project serves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended Learning Outcome(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Assessment to be used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Details</td>
<td>a) Timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Who is responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Target population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Details</td>
<td>a) How will data be reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) How will it be shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Who will it be shared with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reference


Learning & Development Outcomes

1. Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application

   a) Understanding knowledge from a range of disciplines
      - Possesses knowledge of human cultures and the physical world; possesses knowledge of a specific subject matter
   b) Connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences
      - Using different sources and combining them to solve problems. Know how to access different sources of information such as internet, texting, data bases, and observations.
   c) Constructing Knowledge
      - An individual, who personalizes learning, makes meaning from text, instruction, and experiences. Uses experience and other sources of information to create new insights.
   d) Relating knowledge to daily life
      - Makes the connections between classroom and out-of-classroom learning. Articulates career choices based on assessment of interests, values, skills and abilities.

2. Cognitive Complexity

   a) Critical Thinking
      - Identify important problems, questions and issues. Assess assumptions and consider alternative perspectives and solutions.
   b) Reflective thinking
      - Applies previously understood information, concepts, and experiences to a new situation or setting. Rethinks previous assumptions.
   c) Effective reasoning
      - Uses complex information from a variety of sources including personal experience and observation to form a decision or opinion. Is open to new ideas and perspectives.
   d) Creativity
      - Integrates mental emotional, and creative processes for increased insight, formulates new approach to a particular problem.

3. Intrapersonal Development

   a) Realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self respect
      - Articulates rationale for personal behaviour seeks and considers feedback from others. Employs self reflection to gain insight; functions without need for constant reassurance from others. Balances needs of self with needs of others
b) Identity development
   - Recognizes and exhibits interdependence in accordance with cultural and personal values. Identifies and commits to important aspects of self.

c) Commitments to ethics and integrity
   - Incorporates ethical reasoning into action. Explores and articulates the values and principles involved in personal decision making. Accepts personal accountability.

d) Spiritual Awareness
   - Develops and articulates personal belief system. Unders