

## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Academic Program**

Any undergraduate, graduate, or certificate program that has been assigned a unique Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code on the THECB's Degree Program Inventory for UNT. For assessment, each program level (undergraduate, graduate and/or certificate) is considered its own academic program and may have their own set of student learning outcomes. UNT does not offer any undergraduate standalone certificates.

### **Accountability**

The assessment of some unit, such as a department, program or entire institution, which is used to satisfy some group of external stakeholders. Stakeholders such as accreditation agencies, state government, or governing boards hold institutions responsible for the outcomes of programs or other measures.

### **Action Research**

Research involving the systematic collection of data in order to address certain questions and issue so as to improve delivery of student support services, student success, and effectiveness.

### **Affective Outcomes**

Outcomes of program/service that reflect feelings more than understanding; likes, pleasures, ideals, dislikes, annoyances, values. (Indirect measures of learning)

### **Annual Report**

A four-column report from each department and program based on its administrative or student learning outcomes that is submitted annually by October 15, which outlines how the department/program assesses its outcomes and analyzes its results to implement continuous improvement actions. Describes results, provides evidence of results, provides planned improvement actions and describes improvements implemented since previous annual report.

### **Assessment**

The systematic collection, review, and use of information about administrative outcomes and progress towards performance targets. For academic programs outcomes assessment is the process of systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches program's expectations and using the resulting information to implement improvement actions as a program.

## **Assessment Cycle**

The assessment cycle varies by department/program, but all is reported annually by October 15. Typically, it is dictated by the programs and services and may include program design, instrument development, data collection, data analysis and program modification. This cycle in an ideal setting will be fluid, dynamic, ongoing and cyclical in nature.

## **Assessment Plan**

A unit's declaration of what it will assess for the current cycle, including goals, outcomes, measures, and numeric criteria.

## **Assessment Tool**

Any instrument that has been designed to collect objective data about students' knowledge and skill acquisition or data towards administrative outcomes.

## **Benchmark**

Student performance standards (the level(s) of student competence in a content area). Also refers to the practice of researching the activities of peer institutions to make knowledgeable comparisons.

## **Cohort**

A group whose progress is followed by means of measurements at different points in time. A group of students who enter a program together and typically proceed through their coursework in the same sequence, at the same time.

## **Confidence Interval**

Range with a specified probability that a result lies within that range. Example: 95% confidence level = there is a 95% chance the result lies within this range. Confidence interval  $\pm 2.5$  = plus/minus 2.5 percentage points (e.g. opinion polls). The width of the confidence interval gives us some idea about how uncertain we are about the difference in the means. A very wide interval may indicate that more data should be collected before anything definite can be said. In social science research, a CI  $\pm 3$  is considered very strong.

## **Continuous Improvement**

The ongoing improvement of programs, services, or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements using data analysis from the assessment of outcomes aligned with the mission of the institution.

## **Core Curriculum (see general education assessment)**

### **Criterion**

Part of an assessment plan that establishes a threshold of acceptable performance level. A quantitative performance target.

### **Direct Assessment**

Assessment to gauge student achievement of learning outcomes directly from their work or interaction with program/service.

### **Direct Measure**

A performance-based indicator of success. Direct measures include exams/tests, course-embedded assessments, portfolios, capstone projects, performances, presentations, exhibits, internship evaluations, and clinical evaluations. Data is not based on opinions or perceptions, but observable skills, abilities or knowledge.

### **DOE**

United States Department of Education

### **Effect size**

Measures the magnitude of the result, and can be interpreted as an indicator of how much use in the real world does result have. "Something is going on here." Effect sizes are utilized to let the researcher know how large the differences are and if the differences found have any practical significance. Effect sizes range from 0 to 1 (or 0 to 1 for nonparametric data). Cohen (1988) recommends researchers interpret findings utilizing anchors for large effect sizes as  $R^2 = .25$ , medium effect sizes of  $R^2 = .09$  and small effect sizes of  $R^2 = .01$ .

### **External Review**

Part of a periodic comprehensive review that provides an external perspective regarding the quality and effectiveness of a unit's programs, services, resources, processes, and operations. Its purpose is to assure an objective, unbiased assessment of the unit. The external review must consist of reviewers from outside of the institution.

### **Four Column Improvement Plan**

A summary report generated in the Improve system which lists the outcomes, assessment, criterion, results, evidence and improvement actions for a program or department.

## **General Education Assessment (core curriculum)**

Assessment that measures the campus-wide, general education competencies agreed upon by the university core. General education assessment is more holistic in nature than program outcomes assessment because competencies are measured across departments, rather than just within a single department.

## **Implementation Plan**

A plan developed after a unit has completed a self-study and external review, in the form of a set of operational goals and outcomes that sets the agenda for change and quality enhancement for the unit until the next periodic comprehensive review.

## **Improvement Actions**

Intentional actions to improve student learning outcomes or administrative outcomes through curricular, pedagogical, academic support, professional development, improved assessment, raised criterion or other procedure/process.

## **Indirect Assessment**

Assessment that deduces student achievement of learning outcomes or administrative outcomes through the reported perception of learning or services by students, staff and/or others.

## **Indirect Measure**

A non-performance-based indicator of success. Indirect measures include results from surveys, focus groups, interviews, retention and graduation rates, involvement records, and graduate school and job placement rates.

## **Institutional Effectiveness**

The systematic and ongoing process of collecting, analyzing, and implementing data-driven decisions as related to the goals and outcomes in support of the UNT Strategic Plan.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Operational statements describing specific student behaviors that evidence the acquisition of desired goals in knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes or dispositions. Learning outcomes can be usefully thought of as behavioral criteria for determining whether students are achieving the educational goals of a program, and, ultimately, whether overall program goals are being successfully met. Outcomes are sometimes treated as synonymous with objectives, though objectives are usually

more general statements of what students are expected to achieve.

### **Mean**

A simple statistical model of the center of the distribution of the scores. A hypothetical estimate of the “typical score.” Also known as the average.

### **Measurable Criteria**

An intended student outcome, or administrative objective, restated in a quantifiable, or measurable, statement. "60% of residents will attend a sponsored program;" "75% of responding male students will indicate on a survey that they have read materials about career opportunities on campus."

### **Median**

The middle score of the set of ordered observations.

### **Method**

The evidence, or measure, a unit uses to determine whether an outcome has been met.

### **Mode**

The most frequently occurring score in a set of data.

### **Norm**

A distribution of scores obtained from a norm group. The norm is the midpoint (or median) of scores or performance of the students in that group. “Fifty percent will score above and fifty percent below the norm.”

### **Portfolio**

A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selection of its contents, and should include information about the performance criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation.

### **Portfolio Assessment**

Portfolios may be assessed in a variety of ways. Each piece may be individually scored, or the portfolio might be assessed merely for the presence of required pieces, or a holistic scoring process might be used, and an evaluation made on the basis of an overall impression of the student's collected work. It is common that assessors work

together to establish consensus of standards or to ensure greater reliability in evaluation of student work. Established criteria are often used by reviewers and students involved in the process of evaluating progress and achievement of objectives.

### **Program Assessment**

Assessment to determine the extent to which students in a departmental program can demonstrate the learning outcomes for the program.

### **Qualitative Assessment**

Primarily answers “Why?” questions. Involves focus groups, interviews, extreme case discussions, theme analysis, open-ended questions and generally inserts the researcher or assessment staff member into the process.

### **Quantitative Assessment**

Primarily answers “What?” questions. Involves numbers, surveys, scales, finite instruments, statistical analysis and generally isolates the researcher or assessment staff member from the process.

### **Reliability**

An assessment tool’s consistency of results over time and with different samples of students. Put simply, will this assessment perform the same way every time it is used?

### **Results**

Outcomes and effects in achieving purpose addressed and implied in the assessment items.

### **Rubric**

A set of criteria specifying the characteristics of a learning outcome and the levels of achievement in each characteristic. Rubrics are typically score-based and involve pre-defined categories of performance.

### **SACSCOC**

Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges

### **Statistical Significance**

A result is called statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. It is not a measure of importance or meaningfulness. It just means that it is probably true.

## **Statistics**

In the most general sense, statistics describes a set of tools and techniques that is used for describing, organizing, and interpreting information or data (Salkind, 2008, p.7).

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

Statements of what a student should know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning (e.g., a course or a program).

## **THECB**

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

## **Validity**

The degree to which an assessment measures (a) what is intended, as opposed to (b) what is not intended, or (c) what is unsystematic or unstable.

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