

ASSESSMENT MATTERS

Transition to AMS by Taskstream

As we finish up our last set of AMS workshops this week, we would like to thank all of you who participated and learned the new system. We had approximately 106 people attend the workshops and had some great interaction throughout the sessions. We will be holding some office hours/open lab hours for those of you who

still have questions, or need some help entering your assessment information into AMS. We will be available every Tuesday from 1:00-3:00 pm and Wednesday from 8:00-10:00 am, on May 15 thru July 2, except for the week of June 18th. Just come on down to OIA and we will be glad to help you. You can also give us a call during those times.

ANNUAL UPDATES DUE BY JULY 1, 2018

JUST A REMINDER THAT ALL ASSESSMENT PLANS SHOULD BE UPDATED IN AMS WITH NEW FINDINGS AND CHANGES FOR THE 2017-2018 YEAR.

Meanwhile, while we take some time off over the summer and consider changes for the fall semester, maybe it is time to re-think our goals and outcomes. Here are some tips:

SOME LEARNING GOALS ARE PROMISES WE CAN'T KEEP

I look on learning goals as promises that we make to students, employers, and society: If a student passes a course or graduates, he or she WILL be able to do the things we promise in our learning goals.

But there are some things we hope to instill in students that we can't guarantee. We can't guarantee, for example, that every graduate will be a passionate lifelong learner, appreciate artistic expressions, or make ethical decisions. I think these kinds of statements are important aims that might be expressed in a statement of values, but they're not really learning goals, because they're something we hope for, not something we can promise. Because they're not really learning goals, they're very difficult if not impossible statements to assess meaningfully.

How can you tell if a learning goal is true learning goal—an assessable promise that we try to keep? Ask yourself the following questions.

Is the learning goal stated clearly, using observable action verbs? Appreciate diversity is a promise we may not be able to keep, but Communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds is an achievable, assessable learning goal.

How have others assessed this learning goal? If someone else has assessed it meaningfully and usefully, don't waste time reinventing the wheel.

How would you recognize people who have achieved this learning goal? Imagine that you run into two alumni of your college. As you talk with them, it becomes clear that one appreciates artistic expressions and the other doesn't. What might they say about their experiences and views that would lead you to that conclusion? This might give you ideas on ways to express the learning goal in more concrete, observable terms, which makes it easier to figure out how to assess it.

Is the learning goal teachable? Ask faculty who aim to instill this learning goal to share how they help students achieve it. If they can name specific learning activities, the goal is teachable—and assessable, because they can grade the completed learning activities. But if the best they can say is something like, "I try to model it" or "I think they pick it up by osmosis," the goal may not be teachable—or assessable. Don't try to assess what can't be taught.

What knowledge and skills are part of this learning goal? We can't guarantee, for example, that all graduates will make ethical decisions, but we can make sure that they recognize ethical and unethical decisions, and we can assess their ability to do so.

How important is this learning goal? Most faculty and colleges I work with have too many learning goals—too many to assess well and, more important, too many to help students achieve well in the time we have with them. Ask yourself, "Can our students lead happy and fulfilling lives if they graduate without having achieved this particular learning goal?"

But just because a learning goal is a promise we can't keep doesn't mean it isn't important. A world in which people fail to appreciate artistic expressions or have compassion for others would be a dismal place. So continue to acknowledge and value hard-to-assess learning goals even if you're not assessing them.

For more information on assessing the hard-to-assess, see Chapter 21 of the new 3rd edition of [Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide](#).

Linda Suskie May 2, 2018 Blog post: A Common Sense Approach to Assessment & Accreditation

