

ASSESSMENT MATTERS

WHAT'S A GOOD SCHEDULE FOR ASSESSING PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES?

Linda Suskie is a nationally recognized authority in outcomes assessment. She maintains a [Blog](#) associated with assessment and often has quite good tips on the topic. Here is one that she shared recently from her forthcoming, third edition, of [Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide](#).

If a program isn't already assessing its key program learning outcomes, it needs to assess them all, right away, in this academic year.

All the regional accreditors have been expecting assessment for close to 20 years. By now they expect implemented processes with results, and with those results discussed and used. A schedule to start collecting data over the next few years—in essence, a plan to come into compliance—doesn't demonstrate compliance.

Use assessments that yield information on several program learning outcomes.

Capstone requirements (senior papers or projects, internships, etc.) are not only a great place to collect evidence of learning, but they're also great learning experiences, letting students integrate and synthesize their learning.

Do some assessment every year.

Assessment is part of the teaching-learning process, not an add-on chore to be done once every few years. Use course-embedded assessments rather than special add-on assessments; this way, faculty are already collecting assessment evidence every time the course is taught.

Keep in mind that the burden of assessment is not assessment per se but aggregating, analyzing, and reporting it.

Again, if faculty are using course-embedded assessments, they're already collecting evidence. Be sensitive to the extra work of aggregating, analyzing, and reporting. Do all you can to keep the burden of this extra work to a bare-bones minimum and make everyone's jobs as easy possible.

Plan to assess all key learning outcomes within two years—three at most.

You wouldn't use a bank statement from four years ago to decide if you have enough money to buy a car today! Faculty similarly shouldn't be using evidence of student learning from four years ago to decide if student learning today is adequate. Assessments conducted just once every several years also take more time in the long run, as chances are good that faculty won't find or remember what they did several years earlier, and they'll need to start from scratch. This means far more time is spent planning and designing a new assessment—in essence, reinventing the wheel. Imagine trying to balance your checking account once a year rather than every month—or your students cramming for a final rather than studying over an entire term—and you can see

Wishing you and your family a safe and happy Thanksgiving Holiday!



how difficult and frustrating infrequent assessments can be, compared to those conducted routinely.

Keep timelines and schedules flexible rather than rigid, adapted to meet evolving needs.

Suppose you assess students' writing skills and they are poor. Do you really want to wait two or three years to assess them again? Disappointing

outcomes call for frequent reassessment to see if planned changes are having their desired effects. Assessments that have yielded satisfactory evidence of student learning are fine to move to a back-burner, however. Put those reassessments on a staggered schedule, conducting them only once every two or three years just to make sure student learning isn't slipping. This frees up time to focus on more pressing matters.

About Linda Suskie...

Internationally recognized consultant, speaker, writer, and workshop facilitator on a broad variety of higher education assessment and accreditation topics.

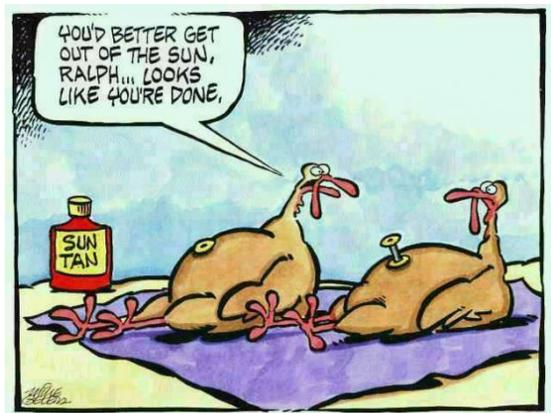
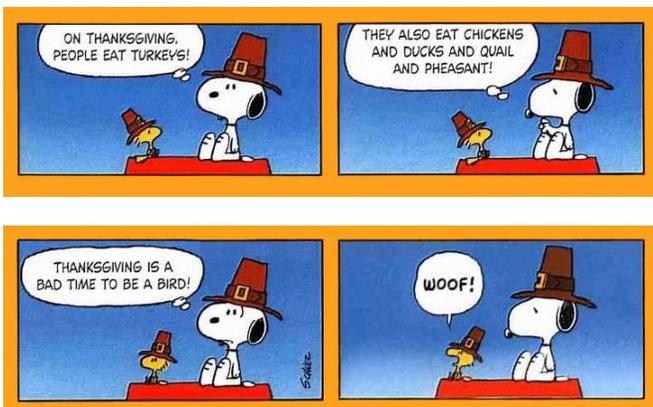
- [Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide](#) (Jossey-Bass) is one of the best-selling books on assessment in higher education. **The 3rd edition will be published on February 4, 2018.** Pre-order your copy [here](#).
- [Five Dimensions of Quality: A Common Sense Guide to Accreditation and Accountability](#) (Jossey-Bass) features a foreword by Stan Ikenberry.

I offer a plainspoken, open-minded, flexible, sensitive approach that respects all backgrounds and disciplines and builds trust and rapport. After seven years as a Vice President at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (an accreditor of colleges and universities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States), I now work with colleges and universities throughout the United States and abroad.

With 40 years of experience in higher education administration, I understand how colleges work. Prior positions include serving as Director of the American Association for Higher Education's Assessment Forum, Associate Vice President for Assessment & Institutional Research at Towson University, Assistant to the President for Planning at Millersville University, and Director of Institutional Research at the State University of New York College at Oswego. I have hands-on experience in assessment, institutional research, strategic planning, and quality management.

I have taught graduate courses in assessment and educational research methods and undergraduate courses in writing, statistics, and developmental mathematics.

I hold a B.A. in Quantitative Studies from Johns Hopkins University and an M.A. in Educational Measurement and Statistics from the University of Iowa.



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