



Student Learning Assessment Plans: Guidance, Definitions, and Resources

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Introduction

With the adoption of revised standards in 2014, MEAC has added a new benchmark requiring each school to provide a narrative description of their assessment plan:

Standard II / Benchmark C Learning Assessment

The program has an assessment plan by which students are regularly evaluated on their acquisition of the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to attain the competencies specified in the MEAC Curriculum Checklist of Essential Competencies.

Demo II.C1.1 | Provide a narrative description of your assessment plan.

This publication is intended to provide guidance to schools seeking accreditation or re-accreditation who must meet this new benchmark and to the MEAC reviewers and board members who must determine whether schools have met the requirements.

Background

All schools assess students -- it is part of their contract with students. Accredited midwifery schools are deeply committed to providing the learning opportunities, feedback, and student services that support the students' successful attainment of competency and readiness to enter the profession of midwifery. But that also means that schools have the obligation to determine when a student has not achieved competency and to perform that duty objectively and fairly. Every school should be able to describe how and why they have chosen the assessment methods they rely on to make that determination.

The foundation of MEAC accreditation has always been competency-based education and every accredited school must be able to link their curriculum and evaluation methods to the assessment of specified competencies. Now as higher education more generally is recognizing the value of competency-based education, there is increasing attention being brought to assessment of student competency and many more robust resources are available to assist schools than ever before. Going forward, MEAC, like other accrediting agencies, will expect that schools are able to describe and defend their assessment plans with a rationale informed by the best available evidence regarding student assessment. For the time being, schools must be able, at a minimum, to describe what they are currently doing in relation to student assessment.

What is an assessment plan?

The program is expected to provide an overview of how individual student achievement of competencies is assessed throughout the program. This is different from the plan for ongoing program assessment required in Standard I Benchmark B, which is meant to address overall program goals, including aggregate student achievement rather than individual student achievement. It's also different from the specific student assessment methods that are described in the syllabus provided to students for each course, module or discrete unit of instruction as required in Standard II Benchmark B. While the assessment plan encompasses the specific student assessment methods described in each syllabus, the expectation is that the plan provides a broader overview of the

school's approach to student assessment, who is involved planning and what resources are used to inform the plan, a general description of methods used for assessment, the sequence and timing of assessment, who is responsible and what training is provided for those responsible.

What should the plan include?

The assessment plan should include:

- An explanation of how the assessment plan was developed: who was involved; what references from the literature, consultants or other outside resources were used; and how often it is reviewed.
- A description of the various methods for assessing student knowledge and abilities.

The assessment plan should include both formative and summative assessments. How are students supported in their learning by formative assessments that help them to understand what they have achieved and what else they have to learn? There are numerous tools for assessing student learning, including portfolios, oral presentations, exams, problem sets, case studies, structured and open-ended interviews, surveys, pre-test/post-test, skills demonstration, observations, focus groups, journals. This is an opportunity in a narrative description to give an overview of the kinds of tools employed in your program.

How does the program ensure that students have mastered each competency with a summative assessment? This links to the MEAC Curriculum Checklist of Essential Competencies Worksheet which asks you to list the final, summative assessment method(s) used to assess student achievement of each competency. You might just refer to that document or you might elaborate with an explanation of how you chose various methods.

The assessment plan should address concerns about the validity and reliability of your assessment methods. Validity refers to how well an assessment method measures what it is purported to measure. Is the test content, for instance, linked to the subject areas covered in the course? Does the comprehensive exam include a sampling of content from the full range of knowledge a student is expected to know? Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. If you administer a test twice to the same group of students, do you get the same results? If you administer a test to two different groups of students, do you get the same results? If one preceptor evaluates a student's competency, would another preceptor make the same decision?

While it is not feasible for small institutions and individual course instructors to design assessment tools that achieve the same level of psychometrically-sound validity and reliability that certifying agencies must meet, programs should give consideration to these concepts when developing their assessment plan. There are numerous challenges, for instance, in assuring that clinical preceptors distributed across the country, are providing students with the same opportunities for

experience and have consistent expectations for student performance that demonstrates competency. Programs employ a variety of means to improve validity and reliability given these challenges: preceptor training in assessment, standardized instructions and evaluation tools, student feedback, peer or supervisor observation of preceptor performance. Some programs also use an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) to test the practical skills of students in a more objective way.

- The timeline for assessment of students.

This is an opportunity to describe in general terms when students are assessed. This, of course, links to Standard II Benchmark A Curricular Mapping, as most courses or other discrete units of instruction typically incorporate assessment methods both during the student's learning process and at the end of the course. Likewise, it links to the MEAC Curriculum Checklist of Essential Competencies Worksheet. In this timeline, you might just explain how all that fits together and refer to the other documents. Or, if you also administer written examinations at one or more mid-points during the student's enrollment or a final comprehensive examination, you would also explain the timing of those assessments.

- A description of who is responsible for student assessment (course instructors, clinical preceptors, other faculty or individuals who participate in written, oral or clinical examinations).

Here you would explain if course instructors develop their own examinations or if they use tools provided by the program, whether or not there is a peer or supervisor review process for assessment methods used in courses, if the instruction and assessment are separate roles, who contributes to comprehensive exam questions, and so on.

- A description of orientation or training provided for everyone involved in student assessment.

This is linked to Standard III Benchmark B Faculty Orientation and Professional Development which requires programs to provide training in the principles of adult teaching and learning. One component of that training should include the purpose of formative and summative assessment, concepts such as validity and reliability, and the effectiveness of various assessment methods.

Resources

The following list of resources represents just a few of the many books, reports, and websites now available that school faculty, preceptors and administrators may find helpful as they develop and improve their student learning assessment plans.

Another important source of support is the Association of Midwifery Educators which provides an on-line forum for sharing ideas, offers continuing education for midwifery educators both on-line and at conferences, and is always expanding

their resource database.

<http://www.associationofmidwiferyeducators.org/about.html>

Allen, M.J. (2008) Strategies for Direct and Indirect Assessment of Student Learning. SACS-COC Summer Institute July 28, 2008
file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/DirectandIndirectAssessmentMethods.pdf

American Council on Education and Blackboard (2014) Clarifying Competency-Based Education Terms.

http://images.email.blackboard.com/Web/BlackboardInc/%7B2a4b9de0-d95f-4159-98a2-b5b305affdccc%7D_Clarifying_CBE_Terms.pdf

Angelo, T., and Cross, P. (1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers (2nd ed.) . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Banta, T.W., Jones, E. A., & Black, K. E. (2009) Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Catalyst for Learning: ePortfolio Resources and Research. Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Learning. Downloaded December 3, 2014 from <http://c2l.mcnrc.org/oa/oa-analysis/>

Clegg, J. Grading Student Assignments: Using the Grading Rubric and Rubric 4 Reports. How to use rubrics for grading, including a sample rubric. Available to members only:

<http://www.associationofmidwiferyeducators.org/members/documents/rubric/How%20to%20Use%20Rubrics.pdf>

Cook, S. Student Evaluation: Web Resources on Student Evaluation and Assessment. Center for Teaching Excellence. Rutgers, State University of New Jersey.

http://meg.rbhs.rutgers.edu/cte/student_evaluation/studentevaluation.html

Cuff, P.A., Rapporteur. (2014) Assessing Health Professional Education: Workshop Summary. Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education. Board on Global Health. Institute of Medicine. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Available on-line at
file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/IOM%20IHPE%20Assessing%20Health%20Prof%20Education.pdf

Edutopia. Assessment: Look beyond high-stakes testing to learn about different ways of assessing the full range of student ability – social, emotional, and academic achievement.

http://www.edutopia.org/assessment?gclid=CP78re_2qsICFYOUfgodjKQAHA

Kuh, G. D., Jankowski, N., Ikenberry, S.O., and Kinzie, J. (2014) Knowing What Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in U.S. Colleges and Universities. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Downloaded July 24, 2014 from <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/2013%20Abridged%20Survey%20Report%20Final.pdf>.

Maki, P. L. (2010) Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution (2nd ed.). Stylus Publishing.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2007) Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources (2nd ed.). Downloaded December 3, 2014 from
http://www.msche.org/publications/SLA_Book_0808080728085320.pdf

New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (2012) Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education. Downloaded July 24, 2014 from
<http://www.chea.org/pdf/Committing%20to%20Quality.pdf>

Suskie, L. (2009) Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Walvoord, B.E. and Banta, T.W. (2010) Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education. 2nd Edition. Jossey-Bass.

Wehlburg, C. M. (2008). Promoting Integrated and Transformative Assessment: A Deeper Focus on Student Learning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Yglesia, M. (June 2012) The Value of Comprehensive Exams in a Well-Rounded Midwifery Education. Giving Birth to Midwives Newsletter.
<http://associationofmidwiferyeducators.org/enews-articles-june-yglesia.html>