

2014-2015 Outcomes Assessment Report



Overview

Outcomes assessment at Harper College is the process of collecting, analyzing and using data about student learning to focus institutional efforts on improving student achievement and the learning experience. Learning assessment at Harper is based on the following principles:

- The most effective assessment processes are faculty driven.
- Assessment is an ongoing process that leads to change and improvement.
- Assessment is never perfect.
- Academic freedom can be maintained while engaged in assessment.
- Assessment is not a task solely performed as a requirement of accrediting agencies; the reason for assessment is improvement.
- Assessment is not linked to faculty evaluation and results will not be used punitively.
- The use of data to support change leads to the most meaningful improvements.
- Course-embedded assessment is the most effective authentic method of conducting assessment.
- Assessment raises as many questions as it answers.
- Assessment focuses the attention of the College on continuous quality improvement.

The Nichols five-column model of assessment has been adopted by Harper College. This model organizes the assessment process by guiding programs and departments through the process of developing an assessment plan, collecting evidence of student learning, communicating results and developing data-based action plans focused on continuous improvement. The five columns represent the following:

- Identifying the program or department mission (Column 1)
- Defining outcomes (Column 2)
- Selecting assessment measures and establishing the criteria for success (Column 3)
- Implementation and data collection (Column 4)
- Using assessment results to improve student learning or department quality (Column 5)

Academic course-level and program-level assessment, as well as student support and administrative services assessment follow an annual cycle in which the plan for assessment is developed during the fall semester, the assessment is conducted during the spring semester and assessment results and improvement plans are completed upon return the following fall semester (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Assessment Process

ANNUAL OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PROCESS		
PLANNING		
<p>Column 1 – Mission Statement</p> <p>Column 2 – Student Learning Outcomes</p> <p>Column 3 – Means of Assessment and Criteria for Success</p>	October	Meet with Dean to review findings and initiatives from previous cycle and discuss interventions and resources needed to initiate changes – initial planning for current cycle.
	November	Work with Outcomes Assessment Office to create assessment plan.
	December	Submit Assessment Plan (columns 1-3) in TracDat. Assessment plan includes mission statement, learning outcomes, means of assessment and criteria for success. Plan for assessment shared with the program faculty. (Dean sign-off)
IMPLEMENTATION	Mid-January to mid-May	Implement assessment plans.
ASSESSMENT	Mid-January to mid-May	Data collection throughout academic semester.
Collect, analyze and interpret data		
<p>Column 4 - Results</p> <p>Column 5 - Use of Results</p>	May to September	Analysis of assessment data. Data collected is analyzed to identify trends, areas for improvement, and to generate initiatives to improve student learning. Discuss results with department faculty.
	September to early October	Enter data and use of results (columns 4-5) in TracDat. Columns 1-5 completed.
CLOSING THE LOOP	October	Meet with Dean to review findings and initiatives from previous cycle and discuss interventions and resources needed to initiate changes – initial planning for current cycle.
Initiate appropriate changes		New assessment cycle begins.
Report findings to appropriate constituents		Incorporate revisions from last year. Record these revisions in the action taken section of the previous year’s results.

Course-Level Outcomes Assessment

During the 2014-15 academic year, academic departments without AAS degrees or certificates of 30 hours or more participated in the course-level assessment process.¹ The total number of academic departments involved in course-level outcomes assessment was 26. Table 2 contains an analysis based on the outcomes assessment activities of these departments.

Table 2 – Course Outcomes Assessment Analysis, 2014-15

Assessment Submissions	Number of Departments (%)
Documented consultations*	26/26 (100%)
Columns 1-3 submitted	26/26 (100%)
Columns 4-5 submitted	23/26 (88%)
Results	Number of Items (%)
Outcomes process issues	22/94 (23%)
Criteria met, no further action	16/94 (17%)
Criteria met, action taken	19/94 (20%)
Criteria not met, action taken	37/94 (39%)
Total Assessments	94/94 (100%)

*Includes meetings, working e-mails, and working phone calls.

Of the 26 departments engaging in course-level assessment in 2014-15, 23 (88%) completed the full outcomes assessment cycle, a decrease from the 100% completion rate for 2013-14. The number of difficulties completing the full assessment cycle (3) and issues with the outcomes process for individual items (22) were higher than in previous years. Most of these challenges related to data collection issues within those departments, and each department has developed a plan for improving assessment and data collection in future years.

Despite these difficulties, many departments continued to identify actions for improving student achievement of outcomes. Data indicate that 56 of the 72 reported assessment results (78%) identified ways to improve course content, pedagogy or assessment methods, which is an increase from 66% in 2013-14. Following are samples of action plans that were created to improve student learning as a result of course-level assessment findings.

Accounting—ACC101

Full-time and adjunct Accounting Department faculty gathered to discuss the results of their 2014-15 assessment in fall 2015. Harper's Manager of Outcomes Assessment joined the conversation to provide outside perspective on the results of the assessment. The discussion improved faculty

¹Some departments conducted formal assessments at both the program and the course level: Accounting, Business Administration, Computer Information Systems, and Law Enforcement and Justice Administration.

awareness of content areas where students struggled and encouraged engagement with students in those areas. It also served as a catalyst for future dialogue across the department focusing on using assessment results for improvement. From these discussions, the department decided to review textbook options and revise the ACC101 exams to ensure outcomes are more equally assessed.

Art—ART105

Although the spring 2015 assessment of ART105 showed positive results overall, student performance was relatively low on the “providing evidence for interpretation/analysis” outcome. Thus, the ART105 assessment team met with all instructors who teach the course to discuss better ways to address the outcome. After implementing enhanced classroom teaching strategies related to the outcome, the team planned to develop a targeted assessment instrument and assignment to better measure student success in relation to the outcome.

Chemistry—CHM121

The Chemistry department is implementing several changes based on the results of its 2014-15 assessments. After determining that students did not perform well on the assessment of three course outcomes, the department determined that students need to be provided with more opportunities to explain macroscopic properties at the particulate level, additional exposure to molecular-level representation of chemical concepts, and opportunities to work on problems that involve more than algorithmic solutions. Faculty shared activities and techniques used to address this concept and agreed to emphasize intermolecular forces of attraction in 2015-16. Faculty members will also include more challenging problems for students to complete during discussion and on exams.

Philosophy—PHI105

The results of the spring 2015 Philosophy course assessment showed that student performance was low for the outcome “apply distinct philosophical perspectives to a discussion of real-world issues.” Thus, the results were used to establish the agenda and objectives of a Philosophy Faculty Retreat for 2015-16. The retreat aimed to design a common summative assessment that all PHI105 faculty could use to measure student learning of the outcome for implementation in spring 2016.

Career Program Outcomes Assessment

Participation in the outcomes assessment process is a sustainable part of the Harper College culture. All Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees, various certificate programs, developmental math, English as a Second Language, and the Department of Academic Success (developmental English and reading) are involved in academic program outcomes assessment activities.

During the 2014-15 academic year, 39 total academic programs/departments were involved in program-level outcomes assessment. This number represents four certificate programs, English as a Second Language, developmental English and reading, developmental math, and the 34 AAS degree programs. However, two of the AAS programs were unable to participate in the outcomes assessment process due to low enrollment. Table 3 contains an analysis based on the outcomes assessment activities of these programs/departments.

Table 3 – Program Outcomes Assessment Analysis, 2014-15

Assessment Submissions	Number of Programs (%)
Programs unable to assess due to low enrollment	2* (these programs not included in data)
Documented consultations**	39/39 (100%)
Columns 1-3 submitted	39/39 (100%)
Columns 4-5 submitted	36/39 (92%)
Results	Number of Items (%)
Outcomes process issues	8/204 (4%)
Criteria met, no further action	70/204 (34%)
Criteria met, action taken	63/204 (31%)
Criteria not met, action taken	63/204 (31%)
Total Assessments	204/204 (100%)

* CIS – Software Development and Public Relations

**Includes meetings, working e-mails, and working phone calls.

In comparison to 2013-14 data, the completion rates of columns 1-5 have remained steady, with 36 programs completing the full outcomes assessment cycle in 2014-15. Programs improved the rate at which they are using assessment results for improvement. Data indicate that 126 of the 204 assessment results (62%) identified ways to improve course content, pedagogy or assessment methods, which is an increase from 52% in 2013-14.

Following are samples of action plans that were created to improve student learning as a result of program-level assessment findings.

Certified Nursing Assistant

In the 2013-14 and 2014-15 assessments, the department identified variation in assessment results across sites (Harper's main campus and various high schools). Thus, sites were compared to determine actions for improvement. Instructor consultations were conducted to gain further insight into the issues faced by each site. A charting tool was added to course content in order to improve student communication skills, and additional course resources were reviewed to determine potential enhancement of restorative and communication outcomes.

Human Services

After improving assessment results over time, the department developed revised assessments that better align with actions students will experience in the field. For example, one assessment was revised to focus student actions on particular client communities and interventions, application of the developmental helping model, and demonstration of interviewing/counseling skills.

Paraprofessional Educator

Assessment results showed that students were able to make clear connections between instructional strategies and the needs of learners. However, while students seemed to have an understanding of theory and practice, they were unable to support their opinions with evidence from research. Therefore, the department worked to build content into all courses in the department to enhance students' ability to support opinions with research. Because students tend to take the Introduction to Education course early in their studies, modifications were first made to that course. Revisions included redesign of the Case Study and Observation Reflection paper guidelines and rubrics effective fall 2015.

Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technology

The department tracked assessment results over three years for the outcomes "take pressure temperature readings, graph linear measurements and perform mathematical calculations" and "gather data and information on HVAC equipment, components and controls." During this time, improvements were made by implementing step-by-step procedures in the curriculum that have greatly improved student learning and performance. The revisions also improved consistency in the delivery of the subject matter taught by different faculty members in the program. Overall, results consistently demonstrated that the students can apply and accomplish the tasks as required by industry standard.

General Education Outcomes Assessment

Information Literacy

During the 2014-15 academic year, the Learning Assessment Committee and the General Education–Information Literacy Work Group conducted an initial assessment of information literacy at Harper. In spring 2015, the Work Group convened to develop and implement an assessment instrument that would facilitate involvement from a variety of faculty members across the College. Using assignments already embedded in their courses, faculty applied a rubric to score student assignments and citations in three areas: topical relationship of sources to the assignment, quality and authority of sources selected, and accuracy of the citations. Rubrics were available online and in paper format. Scoring was based on a 4-point scale (4=excellent, 3=good, 2=fair, and 1=poor). A total of 472 assignments were assessed, and the tables below show the high-level results of the assessment. Upon review of the results, improvement planning was scheduled for 2015-16.

Table 4 – Overall Spring 2015 Information Literacy Results

	Mean	% scoring 3 or higher
Topical Relationship	3.4	89.6%
Quality and Authority	3.4	86.9%
Accuracy	3.4	79.2%
Total	10.0*	80.3%**

* Of 12 possible.

** Scoring 9 or above.

Table 5 – Spring 2015 Information Literacy Assessment Results as Students Gain Credits

Credits earned as of the beginning of spring 2015	0 (N=47)	1-15 (N=163)	16-30 (N=90)	31-45 (N=70)	46+ (N=102)***
Topical Relationship	89.4%	85.3%	90.0%	94.3%	93.1%
Quality and Authority	85.1%	81.6%	88.9%	91.4%	91.2%
Accuracy	72.3%	73.6%	80.0%	81.4%	89.2%

Students scoring 3 (“Good”) or higher.

*** Due to missing variables for some students, category Ns do not sum to total.

Written Communication

As a result of the 2012 and 2013 General Education writing assessments, the Learning Assessment Committee and General Education–Writing Work Group developed a Writing Improvement Plan to improve student writing across the College. To establish this plan, the Committee and Work Group gathered feedback during fall 2014 semester, through a session at Orientation Week, professional development workshops, postings on the Harper Intranet Portal (HIP) and within the InsideHarper E-newsletter, and a faculty feedback survey. Part 1 of the Improvement Plan, which included development of a Writing Best Practices Manual, College-Level Writing Expectations, and a Writing Improvement Resources page on the HIP, was completed in spring 2015. Part 2 of the Improvement Plan was developed over a longer timeframe, incorporating items that take longer to implement than those included in Part 1, with implementation scheduled to begin fall 2015.

Student Support and Administrative Services Outcomes Assessment

During the 2014-15 academic year, 41 total student support and administrative units took part in the outcomes assessment process. Units from across all non-academic divisions participated, such as Health Services, the Business Office and Institutional Research. Table 6 contains an analysis based on the outcomes assessment activities of these programs/units.

Table 6 – Student Support and Administrative Services Outcomes Assessment Analysis, 2014-15

Assessment Submissions	Number of Programs (%)
Documented consultations*	21/41 (51%)
Columns 1-3 submitted	41/41 (100%)
Columns 4-5 submitted	41/41 (100%)
Results	Number of Items (%)
Outcomes process issues	5/114 (4%)
Criteria met, no further action	35/114 (31%)
Criteria met, action taken	37/114 (32%)
Criteria not met, action taken	37/114 (32%)
Total Assessments	114/114 (100%)

*Includes meetings, working e-mails, etc.

As compared with 2013-14 data, the completion rates of columns 1-5 have increased, with 100% of units completing the full assessment cycle in 2014-15. A higher level of ownership in the assessment process led to a decrease in documented consultations with the Outcomes Assessment Office. However, the office continued to support all non-instructional areas through online materials, assessment handbooks, and drop-in sessions, as well as individual consultations on an as-needed basis.

More than 60% of non-instructional assessments led to improvements in services, programs or other operations. Following are samples of plans and actions as a result of assessment findings.

Job Placement Resource Center

The Job Placement Resource Center (JPRC) used the most recent assessment cycle to study the effectiveness of its marketing techniques. Classroom marketing has been especially effective in increasing the number of students using the JPRC. Based on these results, the department planned to continue marketing for 2015-16, but focus on strengthening employer contacts. Job Placement Specialists will continue to contact new employers and keep in contact with established employers to connect Harper students and alumni to jobs.

Psychological Services

Psychological Services conducted a research study to better understand the students that meet with counselors in the office and who have prior treatment history or are in academic distress. Prior treatment history helps inform future treatment planning and case management, as well as provide meaningful data about the levels of severity and chronicity of concerns many students experience. Academic distress information is helping the department plan future care in terms of formal assessments (intake, extended evaluation), treatment, collaboration with on-campus academic resources, and targeted referral.

Testing Center

The Testing Center analyzed its Advanced Placement (AP) exam processing time, implementing new procedures to make the process more efficient. With automation, AP exam staff processing time improved from a process that once took nine hours to complete to one that now takes a little over one minute.

Tutoring Center

The Tutoring Center compared course completion rates among students who used the Center and those who did not. When compared to the completion rates of those who did not attend the Tutoring Center at all (81.7%), those who attended only once had a comparable completion rate of 81.3%. However, the data showed that students who attended the Center at least two times yielded a higher completion rate of 85.9%. Staff members are using this information to continue improvements in the Center, such as exploring subjects where tutoring is not currently offered and expanding to meet higher student demand. Walk-in tutoring capabilities and tutor trainings were also expanded.

Other Assessment Efforts at Harper College

In addition to the assessment processes and outcomes analyses described above, the College has continued its assessment efforts in 2014-15 through:

- Refining the College’s general education outcomes. Throughout 2015, the Learning Assessment Committee examined, researched, and refined the College’s general education learning outcomes. The committee formed an ad hoc shared governance working group to address concerns relating to the existing outcomes, such as number of outcomes and measurability. This group benchmarked general education learning outcomes at over 20 community colleges, including Illinois peers and high performing colleges across the country. The benchmarking revealed common outcomes that aligned with Harper’s existing general education outcome categories. Five refined general education outcome statements were written based on the existing categories. These initial outcome statements were presented and feedback was gathered at the Harper College Assessment Conference in March 2015. The Work Group planned to continue the revision process in fall 2015.
- The 6th Annual Assessment Conference and Share Fair, which took place on March 13, 2015. Keynote speaker Tom Angelo shared his techniques for “Doing Assessment as if Teaching and Learning Matter Most.” Breakout sessions included “General Education Assessment is General: It’s Everyone’s Responsibility” by Trudy Bers and “The Muddiest Point” by Carly Anger. The conference also included posters presented by Harper College faculty and staff, including Assessment Fellows Abigail Bailey and Malathy Chandrasekar. Follow-up materials can be found on the Assessing Our Students page of the Harper Intranet Portal (HIP).
- The Assessment in the Classroom Certificate Series. This series of seminars provided faculty with tools for using effective assessment in the classroom. For completing the series of three seminars, faculty members earned a Certificate for Teaching Excellence: Assessment in the Classroom, from the Academy for Teaching Excellence.
- The Outcomes Assessment Faculty Fellowship program. Abigail Bailey (Mathematics) and Malathy Chandrasekar (Economics) completed their fellowships in fall 2014. Nellie Khalil (Biology) was chosen as the Assessment Fellow for calendar year 2015.
- Assess for Success newsletters, which are designed to share academic assessment information across the campus. Newsletters can be found on the Assessing Our Students and Assessing Our College pages of the Harper Intranet Portal (HIP).
- Outcomes Assessment Office support of faculty and staff assessment efforts, including individual consultations, workshops, drop-in sessions, and development and updates to assessment handbooks and online support materials.