

## A Glossary of Assessment-related Terminology

**Accountability:** The demand by a community (public officials, employers, and taxpayers) for school officials to prove that money invested in education has led to measurable learning.

**Achievement Test:** Standardized test designed to measure the amount of knowledge and/or skill a person has acquired. Such testing evaluates the test-taker's learning in comparison with a standard or norm.

**Alternative Assessment:** Used to describe alternatives to traditional, standardized, norm- or criterion-referenced traditional paper and pencil testing. Portfolios and instructor observation of students are also alternative forms of assessment.

**Analytic Scoring:** Evaluating student work across multiple areas of performance rather than from an overall impression (see: holistic scoring). In analytic scoring, individual scores for each area are scored and reported.

**Anchor:** A sample of student work that exemplifies a specific level of performance. An anchor would be used to score student work, usually comparing the student performance to the anchor.

**Assessment:** The process of observing learning; describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about courses/programs/services undertaken for the purpose of improving the institution, services, programs, and student learning and development. **Note:** Assessment is not and should not be associated with evaluation. The object of analysis is the program, activity or service, not the individual. Assessment is about improving, not judging the performance of a faculty or staff member.

**Assessment Activities (methods):** Mechanisms by which achievement of an outcome is determined. Examples include surveys, interviews, standardized tests, portfolios, juried performances, research data from outside sources, peer review, etc.

**Assessment for accountability:** This involves the summative assessment of units or individuals to satisfy external stakeholders.

**Assessment for improvement:** This type of assessment feeds directly, and often immediately, back into revision of the course, program, service or institution to improve student learning, programs, or services. Assessment for improvement can be formative and/or summative.

**Authentic Assessment:** Involves asking students to demonstrate the behavior the learning is intended to produce. Rather than choosing from a set of responses, students are asked to accomplish a task or to solve problems.

**Benchmark:** A description of a specific level of expected performance. Benchmarks for student learning are often represented by samples of student work.

**Capstone Experience:** Holistic activities designed to assess students' knowledge, skills, and problem solving abilities using concepts learned at the end of the program.

**Classroom Embedded Assessment:** Activities used by an individual instructor to determine if students are meeting the outcomes in a single class meeting or a small number of consecutive class meetings. The instructor evaluates the results to decide if changes are needed to help improve student learning.

**Course Embedded Assessment:** Activities selected by faculty members, who teach a course, to determine if students are meeting the learning outcomes for that given course. The results of the assessments should be used to decide if changes in the course are needed to help improve student learning.

**Criteria:** Measures or characteristics that are used to determine or verify student knowledge, attitudes and performance.

**Criterion-Referenced Assessment:** Assessment comparing an individual's performance to a specific learning outcome or performance standard and not to the performance of other students.

**Cohort:** A group of individuals whose progress is tracked by examining identified measurements at specified points in time.

**Competencies:** Knowledge, skills, or behavior that a student can perform or demonstrate.

**Competency Test:** A test used to determine if a student has met established minimum standards of skills and knowledge.

**Course-embedded Assessment:** Assessment methods that are integrated into the teaching-learning process as part of the coursework.

**Curriculum Mapping:** The process for documenting the link between course learning outcomes and program goals and outcomes.

**Curriculum-embedded or Course-embedded Assessment:** Assessment that occurs simultaneously with learning and as a natural part of the teaching-learning process. These would include activities such as projects, portfolios and assignments. The assessments occur in the classroom setting, where tasks or tests are developed from the curriculum or instructional materials.

**Cutoff Score:** Minimum score used to determine the performance level needed to pass a competency test.

**Dimensions:** Desired knowledge, attitudes or skills to be measured in an assessment as represented in a scoring rubric.

**Direct assessment of learning:** Assessment activities that gather evidence of student knowledge and skills based upon student performance, rather than perception.

**Educational Objectives:** Objectives that describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, or attitudes students are expected to acquire as a result of completing the academic program. Objectives are sometimes treated as synonymous with outcomes.

**Evaluation:** The use of qualitative and quantitative descriptions to judge individual, course, program and institutional effectiveness. Depending on the level, evaluation information is used for making decisions about individual performance review, student grades and course, program and institutional changes for improvement.

**Evaluation of Faculty & Staff:** A process where employee performance is measured at an institution.

**External assessment:** This uses criteria (i.e. rubric) or an instrument developed by an external source and is usually summative, quantitative, and standardized.

**Formative Assessment:** Specific assessments identifying what individuals know or are able to do and not do when a given learning task. This is a specific focus of student learning assessment within a course.

**Goals:** These are the general aims or purposes of a program and its curriculum, stated in broad terms. Goals should be supported by more specific outcomes (including learning outcomes) that are observable.

**Holistic Scoring:** Evaluation of student work in which the score is based on an overall scoring of student performance, rather than on scoring components of the work individually

**Indirect Measure of Learning Outcomes:** Assessment of learning that gathers reflection about the learning or secondary evidence of its existence. In the case of indirect measures, a recorder (usually a student or instructor) reports the perception of how well a given learning outcome has been achieved.

**Institutional Assessment:** Processes identified by members of an institution to determine the ability of the institution to meet its Mission and Strategic Goals.

**Item Analysis:** Each item on a test is analyzed to determine the proportions of students selecting each answer. This process is used to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses and may indicate problems with the test's validity and possible bias.

**Learning Outcomes:** Measurable statements that describe specific student behaviors that provide of evidence acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Outcomes are sometimes treated as synonymous with objectives.

**Locally developed assessment:** Activities and instruments that are developed by an institution's faculty based on their teaching approaches, students, and course learning outcomes.

**Norm:** A distribution of scores obtained from a norm group. The norm is the median of scores or performance of the students in that group, where half of the scores will fall above the norm and half below the norm.

**Norm Group:** A group of individuals selected randomly by an assessment developer to be used in determining a range of scores and establish percentiles of performance for the assessment.

**Norm-Referenced Assessment:** An assessment where student performance or performances are compared to a norm group.

**Objective Test:** A test for which the scoring procedure is completely specified and not subjective, enabling agreement of the correct answer among different scorers.

**Outcome:** An observable act that can be measured, usually a culminating activity or product.

**Outcome (Student):** A measurable activity, product, or performance that involves students.

**Outcome (Student Learning):** Descriptions of what a student should be able to know, think, or do when they have completed a course or program.

**Performance-Based Assessment:** Direct observation and rating of an individual's performance of an educational objective. The assessment may be conducted over a period of time and usually includes the use of a rubric or scoring guide to provide for objectivity. A test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting is an example of performance-based assessment.

**Performance Criteria or Standards:** Specific descriptions of what individuals must do to demonstrate proficiency at a defined level.

**Portfolio:** A collection of work, usually drawn from students' classroom work. Portfolios can be designed to assess student progress, effort, and/or achievement, and encourage students to reflect on their learning.

**Portfolio Assessment:** Reviewers assess student work on meeting outcomes by use of a portfolio and established criteria of performance. Each item in the portfolio may be individually scored, or a holistic scoring process may be used to present an overall impression of the student's collected work.

**Primary Trait Rubric:** A scoring rubric constructed to assess a specific trait, skill, behavior, or format.

**Program Assessment:** Processes identified by faculty and staff members of an academic or non-academic program to measure identified outcomes as a result of participation in the program or service. The results of the assessments should be used to decide if changes are needed to improve the program or service.

**Qualitative assessment:** Provides data that is analyzed by interpretive criteria and does not lend itself to be analyzed by quantitative methods.

**Quantitative assessment:** Provides data that can be analyzed using quantitative methods.

**Rating Scale:** Qualities of a performance on an assessment that is based on descriptive words or phrases that indicate levels of achievement.

**Reliability:** The measure of consistency for an assessment indicating that the assessment yields similar results over time when applied to similar populations in similar circumstances. Reliability provides an indication of the consistency of scores over time and across raters and different items that measure the same thing.

**Rubric:** A scoring guide that defines the criteria of how an assignment or task will be assessed. A [rubric](#) typically provides an explicit description of performance characteristics corresponding to a point on a rating scale.

**Sampling:** Method to obtain information about characteristics of a population by examining a smaller, randomly chosen selection (the sample) of the group members. If conducted correctly, sampling results will be representative of the population as a whole.

**Standardization:** Procedures for designing, administering, and scoring an assessment in an effort to assure that all students are assessed under the same conditions and scores are not influenced by extraneous conditions.

**Standardized Test:** An objective test that is given and scored in a uniform manner, often with scores being norm-referenced. Standardized tests are often accompanied by guidelines for administration and scoring in an effort to reduce influence on the results.

**Standards:** Statements of expectations for outcomes, which may include content standards, performance standards, and benchmarks.

**Student Learning Outcomes Assessment:** The systematic collection, examination, and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data about student learning and the use of that information to document and to improve student learning. **Note:** Assessment is not synonymous with evaluation. The object of analysis of assessment results is about improving learning and the results should never be used for judging the performance of a faculty or staff member.

**Subjective Assessment:** An assessment where the impression or opinion of the assessor contributes to the determination of the score or evaluation of performance.

**Summative Assessment:** Provides a summary at the culmination of a course, unit, or program.

**Unit:** The designation used for the instructional and non-instructional departments, programs, and college services under the MVCC Institutional Effectiveness process.

**Validity:** The extent to which an assessment measures what it is designed to measure and that the results are used to make appropriate and accurate inferences. An assessment cannot be valid if it is not reliable.

**Value added:** The increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or activity. This can either focus on the individual student (how much better a student does something at the end than at the beginning) or on a cohort of students (whether senior

projects demonstrate greater critical thinking skills-in the aggregate-than freshmen projects). Value added requires pre- and post-assessment for comparison.

Additional Glossaries can be found at: <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/upa/assmt/resource.htm>

## Levels of Assessment

**Assessment of students:** uses the individual, and his/her learning, as the level of analysis.

**Can be:**

- quantitative or qualitative
- formative or summative
- standards-based or value-added
- direct or indirect

**Should be:**

- used for improvement
- aggregated for reporting purposes
- based on established learning outcomes
- systematic and sustained

**Assessment of programs:** uses the department or program as the level of analysis.

**Can be:**

- quantitative or qualitative
- formative or summative
- standards-based or value-added
- direct or indirect

**Should be:**

- used for improvement or accountability
- based on established program goals and outcomes
- systematic and sustained

**Assessment of institutions:** uses the institution as the level of analysis.

**Can be:**

- quantitative or qualitative
- formative or summative
- standards-based or value-added
- direct or indirect

**Should be:**

- used for improvement or accountability
- based on established institution-wide goals and outcomes
- systematic and sustained