

What are students learning at The University of Iowa?



Bringing Student Voices into Outcomes Assessment

Iowa Outcomes Assessment Papers

A useful assessment plan incorporates a variety of strategies for examining student learning. No single approach serves all departments equally well.

Iowa Outcomes Assessment Papers identify common department practices that can be integrated into a department's overall assessment efforts.

Many departments already collect student feedback for a variety of purposes. This paper focuses on practical guidelines and principles for departments that want to incorporate student voices into their program-wide outcomes assessment.

What can students tell you about achievement of department learning outcomes?

Student perspectives can be a valuable contribution to your department's learning outcomes assessment efforts. It can be very useful for the department to know students' perceptions of:

- The program as a whole, looking beyond their experiences in individual courses to address:
 - Integration of learning across courses
 - The helpfulness of non-department electives and pre-requisites
 - Contributions to their learning from non-course experiences such as internships and community service, advising, department activities, student organizations, and study centers.
- The extent to which learning outcomes were addressed through students' experiences in the program
- Features of the curriculum that most helped them achieve learning outcomes, and suggestions for making the curriculum more helpful

Inviting Student Feedback

Reliable ways for departments to invite learning outcomes feedback from their students include:

- Interviews with individual students conducted by the DEO, Director of Undergraduate Studies, or Undergraduate Advisor
- Group interviews with students in a course or seminar that many students commonly take
- Student surveys completed in a class, online, or at a workstation in the department office
- Student Advisory Boards that meet regularly to offer student perspectives on the program or represent student concerns to the faculty

Getting Meaningful Learning Outcomes Feedback From Students

Use Systematic and Transparent Procedures

Let students know what they will be asked to do, and why:

- Invite all students to offer feedback and encourage them to participate.
- Ask all who participate to address the same issues, and consistently document their responses.
- Inform the students of the department's purposes for collecting feedback, who will see it, and what will be done with their responses.
- Thank students for their contributions and let them know how student input has played a role in department decisions.

No one knows better than students how students are experiencing an academic program.

Ask Pertinent Questions

Ask students to address issues that are useful for the department and within students' realm of experience. For example, students are rarely in a position to judge faculty expertise or evaluate their own mastery of the subject matter.

However, students are uniquely qualified to report on their own perceptions and experiences as students. No one knows better than students how students are experiencing an academic program. You can ask them to:

- Think about their learning across courses and tell you how well their courses and other learning opportunities worked together.
- Describe what they think contributed to their learning (not focusing on what they *like* or *want*, but on what *helped* or *hindered* their learning).
- Reflect on how well their experiences in the program supported their achievement of department learning outcomes.
- Report their level of confidence in how well the program has prepared them for their next steps.

Request Constructive Information

Ask students to identify successes as well as areas for improvement, and to be specific in their examples or recommendations for change.

- Include questions that explicitly ask students to identify what is working well or what they benefited from the most.
- If students are asked to identify areas of dissatisfaction, then they should also be asked for specific suggestions about how to make things better.

Review Feedback as a Department and Use It to Inform Program Practices

Make specific plans for the department to examine students' feedback and to discuss implications for program effectiveness or improvement.

- Set aside time at faculty meetings for review of student feedback.
- Expect feedback to reflect a variety of student experiences and perceptions. Look for patterns, recurring themes, and points of consensus rather than focusing on exceptional individual experiences (good or bad).
- Provide context for student feedback by reviewing it alongside information from other sources such as assessment of student learning, perceptions of faculty, and surveys of alumni, employers, or other students.

