

Common Assessment Plan Potholes

Issue #1: Outcome statement is too broad- and sometimes sounds more like a goal than an outcome. Units should NOT try to address all aspects of their program/service area in those outcome statements! The outcome statement should be something specific that you want your students (or those you serve) to learn or improve upon. Remember that intended outcomes must address what the learner or recipient of services will experience as a result of our actions, NOT what "we" (the instructor or service provider) will do. Don't try to combine 2 or more actions into one outcome statement. (A guideline is to use only one action verb per outcome). Since this assessment process will be happening every year, we have the leisure to take "baby steps" in what we choose to assess. The impact of all this is that we are continually working on (in a formalized, documented way) improving student learning and service. As we get further along into the assessment process (maybe 3-4 years down the road), we should be able to look back and say that by focusing on a few specific outcomes each year, we have attained a brighter "big picture". As we make our end-of-year report (analysis and action plan), we could decide to revise, revisit, or maybe even "punt" the outcome based upon what we found in our first year of formal assessment.

Issue #2: Measures for assessing the outcome are too vague. This will often occur if the outcome is too broad. If the outcome is less general and more specific, it is easier to develop a method of assessment. Don't forget to explore the use of a rubric as a scoring device for projects, presentations, or papers. See the following links for more information:

(<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=WhatIs&module=Rubistar> or <http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/rubrics.shtml>). These are excellent tools for assigning a quantitative score to a qualitative process. Once a rubric has been built, then you can assign a range of scores to what you think is "excellent", "above average", "average" or "does not meet standards" (or however you want to categorize it). For the criteria for success, you can then identify what percentage you would like to see in certain categories. Surveys are an excellent tool for evaluating the quality of a service.

Be specific about the what, why, how, when and who of the measures used to evaluate the outcome. You need to address what type of measurement will occur, why the measurement is a good tool for getting the information you need, how and when it will be administered, and who is responsible for making it happen

Issue #3: Achievement target doesn't clearly define "success" It is not enough to make a statement like "90% of students (or constituents) will successfully demonstrate their knowledge of this skill or process..."; there must be some criteria that would define what "successfully demonstrates" means.

Issue #4: Failure to recognize that the plan that is developed is the plan that must be implemented! If the outcomes are too broad and the methodology is too vague, it will be difficult to achieve meaningful results. The end-of- year review process will be nothing more than an exercise in trying to put together something on paper that can be proclaimed as "done". If the outcomes are clear, specific, and measurable (or observable), with clearly identified methodologies and achievement targets, then the end-of-year review process will yield valuable information that helps to define the next assessment cycle. In other words, make a plan that is doable and meaningful!