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1 Prior to designing and implementing any programmatic initiative, the programmer must consider the assessment of individual and group needs as well as environmental or cultural dimensions.

Assessing Programmatic Needs

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Andreas (1993) points out that no matter in which student affairs area we are employed, chances are very good that we will be called upon to work on some phase of programming, from assessment and design through implementation and evaluation. Often, we arrive at a new institution eager to begin our position and are immediately faced with a set of program initiatives that seem outdated, unnecessary, underused, or redundant. When we try to ascertain why programs are in place, we are met with responses such as "we have always done it that way," or "because Dr. X thought it would be a good idea," or "because we had a problem with that once," or "the Chronicle says it is a problem nationally, so we assumed it is a problem here." These difficulties and responses, as well as the fact that student affairs positions require some involvement in programming, all point to a need to know how to conduct assessment prior to both initiating new programs and refining or redesigning programs currently in place. This chapter identifies the models of program planning and discusses the differences between environmental assessment and needs assessment.

The term program may be used to describe a functional unit such as international student programs, a series of activities such as leadership development programs, or a one-shot event such as a resume writing workshop (Barr, Keating, and Associates, 1985). Each of these types of programs requires a somewhat different assessment approach, which may also need to take place on several levels:

Individual or group level—assessing the skills, knowledge, attitudes,
and beliefs of individuals who will attend or take part in the programming
initiative

Environment level-assessing the culture, norms, politics, stakeholders, and organizational structure for issues and methodologies to address as well as those to leave alone

Considering both individual needs and environmental presses will greatly increase the likelihood of a successful programming endeavor. Data collected prior to designing a program initiative, even prior to the planning process, will help define what students or other target audiences need, what program components should be included, when the program should occur, and how and by whom it should be delivered (Hanson and Yancy, 1985).

Assessment has come to mean a variety of things in higher education. Astin, in *Assessment for Excellence* (1991), stated that assessment includes "the gathering of information of students, staff ... information may or may not be in numerical form, but the basic motive for gathering it is to improve the functioning of the institution and its people" (p. 2). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) define assessment as "any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness" (p. 18). Finally, Erwin (1996) notes that assessment is a "process for defining, measuring, collecting, analyzing, and using information to enrich the educational experience of students" (p. 416). All of these definitions consider the importance of (1) collecting data, (2) making meaning out of the data, and (3) using the data to bring about change. Assessment for program design should take into account those three basic steps.

Models of Program Planning

Even though several program planning models exist, most of them do not describe specific assessment strategies as a starting point. All of these models, however, do provide a theoretical basis for program development, implementation, and evaluation. Each of these models will be briefly discussed in terms of how each addresses the assessment process.

The CUBE. Morrill, Oetting, and Hurst (1974) introduced a programming model that was based on a classification system in counseling outreach programs. The CUBE is a three-dimensional model that includes (1) the target of an intervention or program, (2) the purpose of the intervention or program, and (3) the method of delivery for the intervention or program. Using this model, a programmer can consider who should receive the benefits of the program—individual, primary group, associational group, or institution—and define the goal of the intervention as being either preventative, remedial, or developmental. Finally, the methods that will be used to deliver the program (direct, training and consultation, or media) can be designed. This model seems to assume that a preassessment is conducted or at least discussed by those using the model. Yet this particular model does not prescribe the actual process that practitioners should use.

Moore and Delworth. The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) sanctioned the program development model organized by Moore and Delworth (1976). The focus of this model is on the program planning team and the various activities it develops. However, assessment is not listed as an early task. The assessment process is assumed within the expertise of those invited to be part of the planning team and the discussions that take place to generate the program idea. Once they agree upon the program idea, they recommend a resource and institutional assessment to decide whether or not the idea is needed in the current environment.

Barr and Keating. This model is based on both the CUBE and WICHE models. Barr and Keating acknowledged that assessment was necessary for this model to be implemented successfully. Hanson and Yancy's chapter in Barr, Keating, and Associates (1985) discusses in detail the process of gathering data necessary to determine the program needs for institutions.

Barr and Cuyjet. More recently, Barr and Cuyjet (1991) proposed a six-step program planning process that begins with assessment as the first step. They outline five assessment areas to be considered by program planners: (1) current operation, (2) student characteristics, (3) needs, (4) institutional environments, and (5) resource environment. The current operation assessment is a consideration of those activities and programs that are currently in place within the institution. Often, much time and money can be saved through a thorough review of programs currently offered across the campus. Sometimes, those programs may need only better advertising or an augmentation of material to meet the needs of a different population.

Next, Barr and Cuyjet recommend a review of the current student population with respect to their characteristics and needs. Who are the students attending your institution? What skill deficiencies exist? Where do the students live and congregate on campus that might be a good programming site? In this step, attend to the needs of students of color as well as students in other identifiable groups on campus.

Cuyjet. Cuyjet (1996) adds another element to the assessment process in his most recent discussion of program development. He cautions student affairs practitioners to consider past programming efforts, to look at "what has been tried before, and determine why past programs succeeded or failed" (p. 404). In some cases this is more easily said than done. As mentioned earlier, one often starts a new job with little evaluative data from past endeavors. In that case, anecdotal data may be all that is available.

Although other programming models exist, the ones listed earlier are most commonly referred to in the literature. What emerges from a study of these models is the need for student affairs practitioners to develop skills related to assessment and evaluation in order to be good program developers. It is impossible to develop good, ongoing programs without preassessing needs as well as designing appropriate post-program evaluations.

Program Assessment Skills Needed by Student Affairs Administrators

Effective program assessment requires a number of skills and abilities. Even though most of these skills should be cultivated during graduate training, one must keep up with new assessment principles and technologies in order to stay current. Furthermore, as the designers of assessments decide what questions to ask, whom to ask, and what programs or services would be useful to assess, they must continually monitor their attitudes, assumptions, and perceptions to be confident of their validity. What follows is a brief list of skills and attitudes that practitioners should have.

Understand the Methodology of Assessment. Understanding assessment methodology is no easy task. Multiple and conflicting definitions exist, even of assessment itself. Furthermore, learning the techniques required for even rudimentary qualitative and quantitative assessments requires several graduate courses; teaching these techniques is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter. A few basic concepts deserve mention, however. If practitioners wish to go beyond simple measures of student satisfaction with programs, they must use a standard definition of assessment (such as the one included in the beginning of this chapter). Using a standard definition and communicating it to colleagues, respondents, supervisors, and recipients of assessment reports prevents the unnecessary debates about whether a particular activity is assessment, research, or evaluation. Using a standard accepted definition also gives credibility to the project. The discussion of terminology contained in *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners* (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996) provides a comprehensive framework to communicate assessment concepts in a fashion understandable to a variety of audiences.

The irony of the student affairs profession is that, often, those asked to be in charge of program assessment are the midlevel professionals who have not taken a research or measurement course in several years. Some colleges and universities are lucky enough to have within the division of student affairs an assessment specialist who is available to assist with design and implementation of studies. At many institutions, however, there are no staff members who have expertise in student affairs theory, practice, and measurement and design. Fortunately, most campuses have social science faculty members, an institutional research staff, or an academic assessment office staff who have expertise in designing and conducting studies. In addition, workshops about the techniques involved in student affairs assessment are typically offered at the ACPA and NASPA national conventions and at many regional or state student affairs conferences. The American Association for Higher Education offers an assessment forum each June that is designed for academic and student affairs professionals to share exemplary programs and to discuss techniques.

Understand the Institutional Priorities and Values. Before even beginning to assess a program, a wise practitioner will ask why the assessment is necessary (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996). The purpose of most program

assessments is to ensure that organizational mission and goals are addressed. The organizational goals relevant to a particular program might be to promote student learning and personal development, to use scarce resources efficiently, or to respond to a particular campus crisis or dilemma.

The values of an organization also affect the purpose and structure of assessment. Upcraft and Schuh state that "values drive not only what we choose to assess, but also how we choose to do so. When questions about the organizational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy rather than what is needed" (1996, p. 22). For example, determining whether an expensive, time-intensive program to improve the academic success of members of Greek letter organizations justifies its cost requires an understanding of institutional priorities and values. Does the university see itself as having special responsibility for this segment of the student population? Will attention to this group result in a reduction of time and resources available for other segments? Will improvement in academic performance of members of Greek letter organizations assist in achieving the institution's goal of improved retention?

Understanding the institutional priorities and values requires the ability to gain access to both the explicit and implicit priorities and values. Typically, one can read the explicit priorities and values in the institution or organization's mission statement or its strategic plan. Understanding the implicit priorities and values requires more skill and is more susceptible to bias due to limited information or individual preferences. For example, a housing professional who wants to assess the effectiveness of residence hall social programs might be unaware of the chief student affairs officer's and president's priority to emphasize educational interventions. So even if the social programs are assessed to be highly appealing to students and are shown to contribute to students' willingness to stay in residence halls, social program resources might ultimately be reduced in the interest of promoting more educational efforts.

Understand Organizational and Group Dynamics. Those who complete effective program assessment must have the ability to understand the dynamics of the organizations and groups within which they work. Dynamics involve the patterns or norms of organizational decision making. For example, on some campuses individuals external to residence halls, such as academic advisors, campus police, or even the college president, are very interested in assessment of programs designed to prevent substance abuse or sexual assault. Therefore, at these institutions it would be wise for multiple stakeholders to be involved in the planning process.

The *halo effect* is another group dynamics concept in which, for example, students enrolled in a resume writing workshop facilitated by an attractive and popular career development program facilitator may be more likely to judge the handouts to be very well written, even though a staff member reviewing the handouts sees typographical errors and problems with layout.

To counteract the halo effect it is helpful to obtain assessments other than simple self-reports (Nisbett and Wilson, 1978). Assessing students' knowledge in addition to their perceptions or having professional peers review workshop materials are ways to eliminate the halo effect.

Another concept from the literature of group dynamics is the *Hawthorne effect* (Mayo, 1945). Essentially, researchers have demonstrated that when individuals are aware that someone interested in their opinion is assessing them, their behavior changes from what might be otherwise expected. If, for example, students know that their responses to an opinion questionnaire about a particular program affect the continuation of that program, their responses might be either more positive or more negative than if they were sharing opinions with peers who had no influence on program decisions. Again, the wise assessor will view assessment results cautiously, recognizing that the process of assessment itself can affect results.

Understand Assessor's Assumptions. If an assessor wanted to complete an assessment to determine if women students perceive a need for programs on peer sexual harassment, it might be tempting to query only women students. This approach is flawed because the assessor is assuming that only women are affected by sexual harassment—when, in fact, sexual harassment may be affecting students across gender boundaries. Men can be harassed and also are affected by a campus climate that does not openly address harassment.

The assumptions an assessor makes affects the design, implementation, analysis, and reporting of results. All elements of assessment are vulnerable to unintended bias. Assessors may analyze data without attention to interaction effects. So single categories, such as race, age, gender, or residential status, would be analyzed as individual grouping variables that may mask the real possibility that African American women commuter students may be more like other commuter students than those in their ethnic or gender groups.

How then might one ascertain whether unexamined assumptions affect assessment decisions? One way to determine whether written surveys or interview questions are asking what is intended is to conduct a simple pilot test of the measurement device or strategy. To find out if an analysis of conclusions from interviews is correct, an assessor could do a member check, giving participants the opportunity to refute or add to the assessor's interpretations.

As mentioned earlier, assessment as a precursor to program design needs to take place on both a macro- (environmental) and a micro- (individuals and groups) level on campus. We will now explore implications for both types of assessment.

Assessing the Environment

The institutional environment deserves specific attention in the assessment process. It is critical to assess both the formal environment as well as the informal structure to get an accurate picture of the campus. The data may come from a variety of sources and be collected in both qualitative as well as

quantitative forms. Some data can be obtained in an unobtrusive manner from university records and databases. The increased use of technology on campus has also helped with this data collection. Student identification cards are now used as admission to various student services units, so tracking use patterns can be part of normal operations. In addition, data collected from students during the admissions and orientation process is very useful for program planning. More sophisticated programs involve longitudinal tracking of student progress with pre- and posttesting times as a requirement on some campuses for collecting outcomes data. No matter whether a campus has a sophisticated model or practitioners rely on interviews with students during lunch at the dining hall, understanding who students are and what they need to be successful in college should help dictate programmatic initiatives.

Upcraft and Schuh noted that "environmental assessment determines and evaluates how various elements and conditions of the college campus, milieu affect student learning and growth" (1996, p. 167). Knowing this type of information will help the student affairs programmer design a program initiative that accurately reflects and fits into the current environment. However, as Barr and Cuyjet pointed out, "assessment of the institutional environment can be a more difficult task than that of assessing student needs" (1991, p. 716). Successful programs take place in an environment that is supportive of the initiative, is characterized by a healthy political climate, and includes the voices of the various constituencies who may have vested interests in the programs and their outcomes. Finally, one cannot complete this phase of the program planning process without assessing the resources, staff, money, and physical environment available for the programming initiative. A deficiency in any one of the three areas could make the difference between a successful program and a waste of valuable staff time invested in the planning process.

Environmental Areas to Consider

Strange (1991) outlined four areas of the campus environment as physical, human aggregate, structural organizational, and perceptual (part of which is the political). Each of these warrants further discussion as we consider how to appropriately assess the environment in which the program initiative will take place.

Physical Environment. This part of the college campus environment contains all the physical aspects including "natural and synthetic that influence human behavior within them" (Strange, 1991, p. 162). But also the "physical features of the environment influence the extent to which individuals are attracted to and satisfied within any given setting" (p. 165). In some ways this aspect of the environment also constrains some of the student programs that can take place. For example, if a campus does not have, or have access to, a ropes course, this type of group programming experience could not take place.

How may one assess the physical environment? Observation is an important first step. Much can be deduced about student behavior and any corresponding needs just by watching how students interact within a particular physical environment. For example, do students seem segregated by physical constraints or are they moving about and together comfortably? Are more students trying to get into the Career Services Center than that space can readily accommodate? If so, programming may need to occur in different physical locations around campus.

In addition to observing how space is used, programmers need to assess the quality of the programming space available. It may be difficult to provide programming on certain topics or to teach specific skills in an environment devoid of specific accoutrements.

Human Aggregate Environment. All inhabitants of the campus physical environment and their unique characteristics make up the total human aggregate. The people along with their patterns of involvement, interactions, behaviors, knowledge, and skills taken together can be a powerful force on campus. Assessing this aspect of the environment can be very complicated. Some inexpensive methods include observation as well as interviewing. In addition, some assessment instruments could be used to ascertain the usage patterns and behaviors of students, thus providing useful information for program planners. For example, the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (Pace and Kuh, 1998) provides assessment data regarding the usage patterns of various student services, organizations, involvement with faculty, as well as a variety of other curricular and cocurricular behaviors. Armed with this knowledge, practitioners are able to design programs based on the needs of the students in that particular environment.

Structural Organizational Environment. The mission, goals, and objectives of an institution, as well as the manner in which the people in it are organized, compose the structural organizational environment. Ideally, the manner in which the institution is organized reflects the stated mission, goals, and objectives. That is not, however, always the case. Assessing this aspect involves reviewing reporting lines, level of hierarchy, mission, purposes, budgets, and roles in the structure.

Perceptual Environment. The perceptions that an individual has about an environment are based on the subjective viewpoint from which he or she interacts with the environment. Assessing these perceptions can, and perhaps should (Erwin, 1996), be accomplished in both qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviews, focus groups, and a review of user evaluations can all be effective methods for assessing the perceptions of individuals living and working in the environment. A number of instruments are also on the market to assist practitioners in collecting quantitative data from students about the quality of campus life, effectiveness of student services, and satisfaction with the student experience.

The Political Environment. The political environment also needs to be mentioned here because even the best-designed program can fail if the program designer does not take into account aspects of the political process in assessing the need for a program. Recipes for failure might include conducting a program on a socially controversial topic on which the institution's president has taken a firm stand in the media or conducting alcohol education programs on a football Saturday. More often than not, the politics are much more subtle and difficult to ascertain. Brown and Podolske (1993), in their work discussing political models of program evaluation, note that skills needed to assess this aspect of the environment range from "being a good observer, thinker, and politician to possessing high-level consultation, negotiation, research design, and measurement abilities" (p. 217). We would argue that the same skills required in order to be a good evaluator are also required in order to be good at assessing the environment in which the programming will take place.

Collecting Environmental Assessment Data

Environmental assessment data may be collected in a number of ways. For example, if I am a new area coordinator for a residence life operation, I may be very interested in examining the current needs, behaviors, skills, and knowledge of the students living in the halls. I decide that I will gather data to make my decision from several sources including

- Conducting focus groups in each hall by inviting a random group of eight to twelve students to dinner, where I can ask them questions about their living environment (Jacobi, 1991)

- Administering the University Residence Environmental Scales to a stratified, random sample based on class standing, race, and gender

- Visiting students via floor meetings throughout the semester to ask about the quality of the living environment

- Reviewing disciplinary records and discussing the living environment with students who take part in the hall judicial process

- Reviewing incident reports to assess the level and types of physical damage occurring in each hall

- Using part of several Resident Assistant staff meetings and hall council meetings to discuss perceptions of the quality of residence hall life

These various assessment processes will provide the area coordinator with a wealth of information about the residence hall environment, the residents living there, and their behaviors. In this example, the area coordinator may use the assessment data in a variety of ways to select and design appropriate program initiatives.

Assessing Student Needs

Done properly, assessments of student needs can provide valuable direction [or programming efforts. Several principles can make needs assessment results a valid tool for developing programs that will lead to student learning and personal development.

Needs Are Different from Wants. This principle seems obvious, but the concept becomes complicated in practice. Needs, according to Upcraft and Schuh (1996), are those factors, conditions, services, and resources which are necessary for a student to achieve educational goals and objectives. For example, a Dean's Student Advisory Committee tells the dean that to have a meaningful program series on ethnic diversity, the campus needs a kick-off speaker who is well recognized and respected by students, like a congressman or a television news commentator known for powerful insights on the benefits of multicultural communities. Even if the majority of students were to report this "need," the celebrity status of the speaker might not facilitate achievement of the program's educational goals to develop appreciation of ethnic diversity. The celebrity speaker may draw students, but may not be informed enough to send a message that is meaningful and pertinent to the local situation. It is not always clear that a well-known speaker will contribute to students' achievement of the university's goals to value diverse persons and perspectives. The students' perceived need for a big-name speaker is likely to be a want or a desire.

In certain situations, however, a high-status celebrity speaker could meet an institutional or community need. If a celebrity could bring in additional positive publicity about the university's commitment to diversity, perhaps more minority students would apply, thereby meeting an important institutional need.

It is important to recognize that often what is portrayed as meeting a student need is instead addressing either an institutional, community, or administrative need, or a fervent desire on the part of a considerable segment of the student body. In practice, students' desires may often provide good justification for programming decisions, such as purchase of a karaoke machine or providing less-than-nutritious food at residence hall functions. It is important to recognize, however, that these programming decisions are, at best, tenuously related to student needs.

Include Multiple Populations. All too often when student needs are assessed, only students themselves are queried. Secondhand sources of information about students' educational needs, such as faculty or staff, can provide valuable perspectives on students. Faculty and/or staff who have close connections with students and who are veterans at the institution are often excellent participants in qualitative or informal assessments of student needs. Because of their knowledge of the institution and experience working with multiple generations of students, these individuals can be very perceptive and insightful about the student experience.

Often, those most likely to participate in the informal assessments so important for determining students' needs are those with whom administrators have the most contact—the student leaders. Surveying students in hopes of getting input from nonreaders often results in such low response rates that results simply are not useful. Researchers have designed many creative inducements such as prizes, food, and gift certificates to increase students' response to surveys. These incentives do improve response rates somewhat but the cost can, over time, be prohibitive. Other ways to encourage nonreaders to respond to needs assessments include

- Asking faculty to allow their students to be surveyed during class time
- Having students or employees hand a survey to individuals when they are waiting in line for event tickets
- Using focus groups scheduled at convenient times and places
- Scheduling time for informal conversations with students in the dining facilities

Consider Using a Theoretical Basis for Assessing Needs. Evans's (1985) study of needs assessment processes found that items on theory-based questionnaires were judged to be more relevant to students than those on empirically based surveys. Student development theory provides excellent guidance to help assessors determine student needs and measure outcomes of interventions. A variety of developmental theories, including those appropriate for underrepresented populations, provide excellent foundations for high-quality assessment. The recent book entitled *Student Development in College: Theory, Practice, and Research* (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998), provides excellent summaries of developmental theories along with explanations of the related assessment tools. In addition, the authors outline validity and reliability data for each of the instruments they discuss.

Designed to assess psychosocial development of college students, the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller, and Cooper, 1999) is frequently used. Because this instrument can be used to compare group scores at one institution with national norms, it can be used to assess both students' psychosocial needs as well as growth following an intervention.

Using standardized instruments, however, is not the only way to create assessments based on theory. Student development theory is useful in determining what qualitative questions the assessor should construct. Furthermore, theory assists assessors in data analysis and interpretation. For example, let us suppose that the results from focus groups indicated that college freshmen felt that the most effective eating disorder-prevention programs were those that featured a survivor of an eating disorder who could tell students the importance of recognizing symptoms early. One could interpret that many of these students were in Perry's (1968) basic duality (Position 1), by which students typically believe that a meaningful educational experience must have an expert to deliver the correct answers.

Developmental theories also have implications for the details of program planning. For example, if a group of student affairs professionals wanted to design a program to promote responsible use of alcohol, they might interview students, constructing their questions based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) psychosocial developmental theory. This theory posits that students early in their college careers are focused on autonomy and expressing independence, but are later more likely to understand that their actions affect the whole community. Let us suppose that the results of the interviews of freshmen indicated that many students felt that programs about alcohol use were a waste of time, especially if conducted by a faculty or staff member who had disciplinary responsibilities. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, felt that there was some benefit in these programs to help classmates who might have problems with alcohol abuse. The program planners might, therefore, make certain that some substance abuse-prevention programs were conducted by facilitators other than the familiar faculty and staff. Programs might also include comfortable group discussions between upperclassmen and freshman students in an environment that was safe and **secure** for students who had personal or family problems with alcohol.

Use Methods Appropriate to the Problem. In their discussion of myths and facts about assessment, Schuh and Upcraft (1998) suggest flexibility when determining methodology. Neither qualitative nor quantitative methods are superior in every case. The context and nature of the problem dictate the method. In many cases, because of the complexity of issues such as student learning, retention, the creation of environments that promote healthy lifestyles, or students' psychosocial development, no one method can capture the essence of a situation.

It is often tempting for student affairs to simply administer surveys to students to determine what they want in terms of educational programs about complex issues. Such an approach might be highly appropriate if the decision were about which concerts to book or to determine whether additional writing workshops were warranted.

But with emotionally and politically charged issues such as ethnic diversity or sexuality education, it is wise to avoid the broad-based survey approach because it is nearly impossible to understand the motivation and complex feelings behind the answers. If surveyed, students on a particular campus might conceivably report that there is no need for more programs on relationships between diverse ethnic groups. Some students may draw that conclusion because they assume the divisiveness at their college is so severe that no program alone will alleviate the problem. Others might answer that there is no need because they see few problems among ethnic groups at their institution. Others might be expressing antipathy toward what they perceive to be the institution's political correctness. Still others might feel that they had already covered issues of ethnic diversity in high school.

Functional Unit-Level Program Assessment

Table 1.1 illustrates how one student affairs functional unit, career services, might consider the skills, knowledge, behaviors, and beliefs that that office believes it should address through programming for students. The unit in question needs to ask one important question: What do we do to help our clients (students) change, develop, acquire skills, or learn by virtue of their interaction with our programs? All program staff must periodically ask this question and evaluate how the current offerings are addressing the needs of the clientele. The answer to this question should also guide program development and be used as part of the general program review.

Communicating and Using Results

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) note that even if you have done everything right in the program assessment process, the results can be ignored if they are not reported appropriately to the decision makers and stakeholders. They go on to point out that "the most common mistake investigators make is to send a complete and comprehensive report [modeled after a dissertation] to all intended audiences" (p. 281). As busy professionals who receive many reports, flyers, and other written material, college and university administrators may miss important assessment findings if the reporting is not done in an appropriate manner.

Citing Suskie's (1992) work on survey research, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) point out that it is critical to first determine who needs to receive a report of assessment results. Second, a decision should be made regarding the format to be used for reporting the results. Does a particular audience only need a page or two summarizing the findings or will this stakeholder require a formal complete report including tables and statistical analyses?

Table 1.1. Career Services

	<i>In What Ways Do We Want to Help Students Grow and Change by Virtue of Interacting with Our Office?</i>	<i>What Programs or Services Do We Offer (or Need to Provide) to Facilitate This Growth and Development?</i>
Skills	Constructing a resume	Program—How to design an effective resume
Behaviors	How to interact with prospective employers	Service—Mock interviewing with staff
Knowledge	Exploring job opportunities	Service—WWW access in office
Beliefs	Dress for success	Program—How to prepare for your first job

In preparing the report it is critical to keep the writing as readable as possible for all intended audiences.

A note of caution should be given here. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) would advise that care be given to the reporting of particularly negative, sensitive, or controversial findings from assessment. "Probably the most difficult situation for an investigator comes when he or she realizes that the results of a study will not please the decision makers who commissioned it. Worse yet is the situation in which the results show that the decision makers appear to be part of the problem" (p 284). Assessment conducted to assess the needs of individuals, groups, or of the environment can, in fact, produce troubling results. It is politically prudent for assessors to encourage decision makers to be prepared for all possible outcomes of an assessment.

How and to whom the information is to be reported is often a difficult decision. Of course, it would be unethical to withhold the information or to share the results in misleading ways, so the information must be relayed. Perhaps including the decision makers along the way in the report writing will help move the process along and ensure that no one is surprised by the final report.

Final Thoughts

Assessment is a complex, intricate, precise, and detailed process that uses measurement to gauge student needs and outcomes. At the same time, however, those who conduct assessments must keep their eyes on the bigger picture of institutional trends, environmental impacts, and the political implications of potential and actual findings. Because of increased attention to accountability and efficient use of valuable resources, facility with program assessment is fast becoming an expectation for all levels of staff. No longer is simple anecdotal information sufficient to keep programs or major initiatives healthy and protected from budget cuts.

All too often, an individual's skills in assessment become rusty shortly after the completion of graduate training. Professionals would be well served to practice assessment skills both to determine individual student needs and to ascertain what characteristics in the institutional environment have the potential to influence programming efforts. If professionals are continuously assessing the need for programs, determining environmental constraints and supports, and evaluating programming outcomes, not only will they improve their assessment competence but they will also gain credibility within institutional environments that increasingly embrace precise measurement of effectiveness.

Like any powerful tool, assessment requires careful use. Practitioners must make sure that they know their data collection methodologies, are skilled in analysis of information, are unbiased in interpretation of findings, and sensitive to possible implications of their reports. A poorly constructed assessment, unsupported interpretations, or poorly drafted reports are

worse, in most cases, than no assessment at all. Good assessment takes both time and institutional commitment and may affect the amount of attention devoted to other day-to-day operations (Schuh and Upcraft, 1998). Yet if student affairs programs are to compete for scarce institutional resources, assessment and evaluation must take priority.

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2

This chapter discusses the importance of determining learning domains, goals, and objectives, as well as the ethics of good programming. It provides an overview of different types of program delivery methods and of how knowing your audience affects the overall program and its direction. Finally, the chapter explores the importance of reflection in learning.

Developing Interventions That Focus on Learning

Debora L. Liddell, Steven Hubbard, Rochelle Werner

Programming, like any other activity that is taken on by a student affairs professional, should be intentional in order to be effective. But intentional toward what end? This chapter defines the assumptions underlying powerful programming and suggests ways in which programming can be linked effectively to student learning.

Assumptions of Powerful Programming

In order for programs to be effective, the following assumptions should be met.

Programming Can Be a Viable Vehicle for Transmitting Knowledge, Affecting Skills Development, Changing Attitudes, and Helping Students Reach Their Potential. This may be the heart of student affairs work and, indeed, the soul of the student affairs educator.

Programming Requires an Unwavering Commitment to Act Ethically. As we think about our role as educator-programmers, we assume a certain degree of power, authority, and influence that should be coupled with deep responsibility and commitment to keep students safe, even as we are stretching their limits. This means we do not incite groups for the purpose of a good discussion. We do not embarrass students for the purpose of making a point. We accept students where they are developmentally—the racist and the radical alike. Only then can we understand—and act upon—how best to reach them.

Programming Must Be Tied Explicitly to Learning. The Student Learning Imperative (American College Personnel Association, 1994) asks us to be mindful about integrating academic and out-of-class activities for the purpose