

16.03 Principles of Academic Assessment

Eight guiding principles underlie academic assessment at Western Carolina University:

1. The primary aim of assessment at WCU is to involve faculty in the evaluation of academic programs in order to (a) provide evidence of program quality, (b) permit documentation of changes in program quality, (c) establish a longitudinal data base documenting consistently high academic standards, and (d) show evidence of student learning.
2. The WCU assessment program is designed to measure the skills, knowledge, and accomplishments specified in our strategic vision.
3. Assessment is an on-going process designed and implemented by the faculty in keeping with the role and mission statements of the university, and the school and departments in which the programs are located.
4. Defining goals for each program area is the most important step in establishing an assessment program. For each academic major, goals are defined, students' progress toward these goals is monitored, and results are used to continue, modify, or reinforce aspects of the program to ensure continuous advancement in program quality.
5. No single approach to assessment is universally accepted. Therefore, different methods of assessment are appropriate for different programs. The faculty for each program is responsible for determining the methods and appropriateness of the assessment measures used. Possible methods include the following:
 - a. **Faculty-developed, criterion-referenced, end-of-program measurements.** Several approaches to end-of-program assessment may be appropriate including tests, performances, exhibits, and portfolio measurements.
 - b. **Credit-bearing seminars designed to help students synthesize their learning in the major.** Faculty members are responsible for demonstrating how these seminars are appropriate program assessment vehicles and for reporting student achievement in these seminars to the Office of Assessment.
 - c. **Student performances on licensing examinations and other certifying measures.** These may be used to supplement the broader assessment process but the passing rate on such examinations should not be used as the only measure of program effectiveness. Similarly, results from external program accreditation or certification bodies may be used in support of program assessment. Multiple measures of effectiveness should be identified.
 - d. **Related course sequences.** Faculty in programs containing two or more groups of related courses may choose to measure the body of knowledge in each set of related courses. In this case, such assessment might be carried out in the final courses of each sequence; for example, measurement may be made of a concentration within a major as well as a second measurement of the basic major itself.
6. Although students' performance on assessment measures will be used to evaluate programs, scores on assessment measures may not by themselves be used to impede student progress toward graduation.
7. Assessment will focus on programs rather than individual faculty performance.
8. Program evaluation measures will be considered confidential. Identities of individual people will not be released.