



ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

MESSIAH UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

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Run assessment
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Collect any assessment
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Canvas assignments
(e.g. portfolios, surveys,
employment data)

Welcome and Thanks

Jennifer Myers
Work Study, Office of Assessment

Hello, Messiah community! We're officially wrapping up our spring 2021 semester. Our office chose to round out this year's newsletters by discussing how to put our assessment results into action. After spending all year teaching and assessing student learning, we have the choice of what to do with the learning evidence we collected. We can simply run the reports and analyze the numbers, or we can look beyond the graphs and charts to see what they tell us about our students' learning experiences and use the results to improve our programs.

In our feature article, you can find plenty of insights and resources from our office. We hope that this information helps you run reports and carry out end of year AEFIS tasks, but also that they give you some practical ways to use the results you find to enhance the student learning experience at Messiah.

If you would like to discuss how this impacts your department in particular, our office would be happy to set up a meeting to talk with you. We also encourage you to look through the resources that are linked at the end of the article.

I would like to especially thank Dr. Kate Oswald Wilkins, our Director of Assessment, for her contributions to this issue of our newsletter about the power of reflection, action, and collaboration. I hope that you find her insights helpful!

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for your continued assessment efforts throughout this year. Your faithfulness to improving the student learning experience (even in the midst of chaos) is valued so much by our campus community. Best of luck as the semester starts to wind down. Happy reading! —

We want your feedback!

Is there an area of assessment that you think you could help others in or a problem you need help with? We created this newsletter for you, so we'd love to include it in the next issue.

Please send your requests to wsassess@messiah.edu

Assessment in Action

Using the Stories of Results to Advance Our Programs

Jennifer Myers
Work Study, Office of Assessment

The end of the academic year is quickly approaching, but the work is not quite finished yet. This is the time of year when all of our assessment efforts culminate and we can collect data to see student achievement.

But, what is the true relevance of assessment? Why bother collecting these numbers? What do they mean and what do we do with them?

What Do Assessment Results Tell Us?

AEFIS allows faculty to run a variety of reports to track student learning. Different reports offer varying views of student performance. Reports can even be filtered by major, course, gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Each department should explore the reports to find out what data and analysis methods are most helpful in answering your most important questions about student learning.

Having all of this data at our fingertips is amazing. These scores, however, accomplish little on their own. It is only when we analyze and document the data as part of a bigger picture that it becomes relevant.

Director of Assessment Dr. Kate Oswald Wilkins says, "There's a lot of good assessment work happening, but if it's not documented, it's really hard to show that we're examining evidence and making improvements that are evidence-based."

Key Terms to Know:

Assessment Results: Data based on linked assignments that shares how many students met the target for a given objective.

Action Plan: Strategic plan created by an academic department and based on assessment results; describes specific changes that will be made in the coming year to enhance student learning.

Closing the Loop: Record entered after executing and monitoring an action plan for an academic year; details whether or not the plan effectively improved student learning.

Assessment as a Story

Perhaps one of the best ways to consider our assessment results and what to do with them is as a narrative.

Natasha Jankowski, director of the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, asserts, "results in and of themselves are not very useful. **Assessment results become useful when we can tell a story about assessment by sharing the meaning that we made out of the results.**"

By properly assessing and acting on our results, we can share positive stories of the student learning experience with our prospective students, donors, and other stakeholders. We can also improve programs based on where students are performing lower than expected. This helps to ensure each student's academic story has a good ending.

Identifying Action Plans

As May comes, we have the chance to not just process assessment results, but to act on them to enhance student learning. Creating action plans is a key activity that transforms scores and graphs into stories about students.

The first step to designing an effective action plan involves examining assessment results and answering a basic question: "How well did students learn what we wanted them to learn?"

After this, it is time to take a deeper look into the results. What are the strengths and weaknesses among students in a particular course or program? What do these indicate about course instruction, college preparation, or other factors?

Departments should also initiate discussion about possible reasons student performance fell below the target. This is a critically important part of the collaborative assessment process, especially when sections of

the same course are being taught by different faculty with different results.

Kate points out, "these can be challenging conversations... But ultimately, **it benefits students if we have these conversations, and it benefits faculty.**"

All of this can lead to changes in objectives, targets, measures, advising, or other factors. This change, however, should be embraced as a way of improving the student learning experience.

Closing the Loop

Closing the loop marks the end of a chapter in our assessment narrative. Closing the loop invites faculty to examine steps that were taken to implement an action plan and any evidence that indicates improvement that has been seen a year later.

Kate sums it up like this: "**You are reviewing our action plans from last year's assessment cycle... [documenting] what you did to accomplish that action plan, and any evidence that you have that the action plan was successful.**"

While closing the loop is one of the last parts of the assessment process, it is incredibly vital, as it helps us look at the past and create a record that gives direction for the future. We can reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where we are headed in the future with regard to student learning.

Finishing off our assessment narrative this spring marks another year of learning, experimenting, and improving. Hopefully next year, the story will get even better.

Sources and Resources

[*Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* by Linda Suskie](#)

["Evidence-Based Storytelling in Assessment" by Natasha Jankowski](#)

[Messiah University Assessment Resources](#)

[May Development Week Department Discussion Guide](#)

[Managing Assessment in AEFIS Training Presentation](#)