

An Overview of Assessment at Simmons College of Kentucky

What is Assessment?

Assessment is an ongoing process to determine the effectiveness of an institution's programs, services, and operations. Assessment provides a systematic approach to providing evidence of continuous improvement in programs, services, and operations.

Assessment at Simmons College of Kentucky is expected to:

1. Be an **ongoing** process that serves as a formative means of assessing a unit's strategic vision;
2. Involve a **systematic** gathering, analyzing, and interpreting of data to determine how well performance matches expectations;
3. **Use** the resulting information to understand and improve programs, services, and operations.

Why is Assessment Important?

We engage in assessment activities for four main reasons:

- **Improve** programs and services through assessment results that identify areas for change;
- **Support** decision-making processes, planning, program reviews and accountability;
- **Demonstrate** that a program or service is accomplishing what it claims it is accomplishing or that students are learning what it is intended that they learn;
- **Inform** students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of the state of student learning or of a program or service and its impact.

How is Assessment Related to Accreditation?

The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) Standard 2b, with which Simmons College of Kentucky must comply, states:

“The institution demonstrates that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its mission, goals, and program objectives and improve performance through a regular, comprehensive, and sustainable system of assessment and planning. Central to this plan is the systematic

and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures the student's knowledge, skills, and competencies against institutional and programmatic goals."

The Assessment Support Team

The Assessment Support Team is charged with encouraging, coordinating, and facilitating assessment practices for the college by...

- Reviewing and evaluating annual assessment plans and reports for each department
- Ensuring that all programs have student learning outcomes in place
- Maintaining assessment records
- Monitoring best practices
- Providing training in institutional effectiveness
- Nurturing a culture of continuous evidence-based improvements for all College functions.

Membership:

EVP Institutional Effectiveness

IT / IS Representative

Academic Affairs Representative

Student Affairs Representative

Admissions Representative

Retention Representative

Administrative Representative

Principles of Assessment

Assessment is a **tool** to determine the effectiveness of the College's institutional practices, academic programs, and support services. The mission, vision, and institutional goals of Simmons College of Kentucky direct and guide the practice of assessment.

Assessment is **outcomes-oriented** rather than process-oriented. The emphasis is placed on how well students are learning and how well administrative units are operating, rather than focusing on the actions to improve processes. Assessment evaluates at what level the administrative units and academic programs of Simmons College of Kentucky have achieved the outcomes which were their aim. To accomplish this goal, data is collected and analyzed from a variety of assessment tools and measures to demonstrate and document whether or not the outcomes have been met.

Assessment is **continuous**, functioning in an ongoing, cyclical pattern of establishment of outcomes, data collection, data analysis, and recommendations for change. After this process has been completed, the cycle begins over again. This cycle is never truly completed unless assessment results are used to effect improvement in the institution. This is commonly known as "closing the loop."

Assessment is **vital** to the health and continued existence of an educational institution. By identifying areas in which the institution falls short of its mission and by providing evidence-based solutions, assessment ensures that the institution stays focused on accomplishing its mission and making significant, documented improvements from year to year.

Purposes of Assessment

Assessment results and analysis provide guidance for faculty and administration to make changes to improve both their departments and the function of the institution as a whole. These changes are data driven and are supported by evidence collected during the assessment process. Assessment data also serve to assure students, parents, donors, and other stakeholders of the College's effectiveness and faithfulness in achieving its

mission and objectives in the provision of a quality education. The purposes of assessment may be condensed into three key ideas:

- To improve - Assessment activities provide documentation and feedback essential to shape or form better programs and services.
- To inform - Assessment activities show a clearer picture of what is really happening as the College moves to provide effective programs and services geared to enhance student learning and development while achieving administrative and program objectives.
- To demonstrate - Assessment activities provide evidence to demonstrate to what extent programs and units are accomplishing their stated missions and objectives and areas which need further review, revision, and improvement.

Participants in Assessment

Assessment is not a process that is allocated to a single person or a single department. As all facets of the institution must be assessed, every faculty member or staff member may be expected to contribute to the process of assessment, whether through data collection, analysis, preparing of reports, etc. Measuring the institution's health and achievement, along with planning for improvement, must be viewed as a team activity which mutually benefits all participants.

Particulars about Assessment

At Simmons College of Kentucky, learning outcomes assessment is a continuous and systematic process whereby we...

...**Collect** evidence about students' learning;

...**Communicate** these findings with our constituents (students, faculty, administrators, governance, accountability partners, and the community at large);

...**"Close the loop"** by demonstrating to a variety of stakeholders that we use these findings to inform and improve our educational practice.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Simmons College of Kentucky embraces the *American Association of Higher Education's* principles of assessment:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational communities are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and the public.