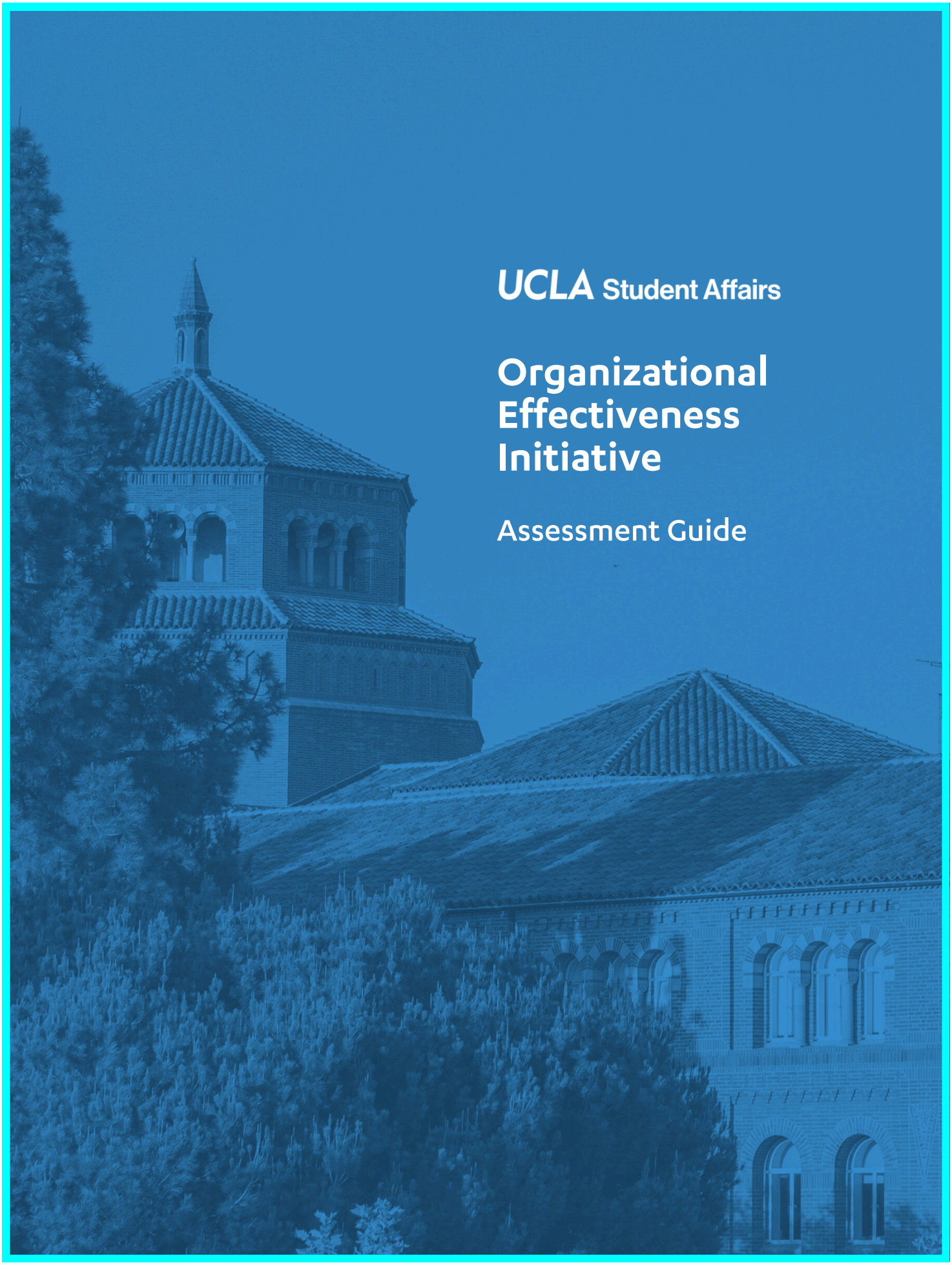


UCLA Student Affairs

Organizational Effectiveness Initiative

Assessment Guide

UCLA Student Affairs
Information & Research Office

Organizational Effectiveness Initiative

Assessment Guide

The Organizational Effectiveness initiative aims to better align Student Affairs with the UCLA Strategic Plan and the Student Affairs Mission and Key Priorities, with an emphasis on continuous improvement.

Assessment and Impact is one of six key areas of the Organizational Effectiveness initiative and focuses on using evidence to inform decision-making and demonstrate the impact, scope, and effectiveness of our work.
Assessment helps programs identify what they hope to achieve, determine what evidence is needed, and use what they learn to strengthen their work. When findings identify a need for broader programmatic or organizational change, change management can help guide how that change is carried out and sustained.

The change management process involves five essential steps:

1. **Prepare for change** by building a shared understanding of the need or opportunity for change.
2. **Develop a vision and plan** that identifies what the program hopes to accomplish and how the change will be implemented.
3. **Implement the change** by engaging stakeholders (staff, students, etc.) in the process, anticipating potential challenges or barriers, and communicating throughout implementation.
4. **Embed and sustain the change** within practices and processes.
5. **Review progress and results** to understand whether the change is having the intended effect and identify opportunities for further improvement.

Although change management is often implemented at the organizational level, its strategies can also be adapted to support divisional, departmental, and program-level improvement.

Assessment and change management can be used together as part of continuous improvement. Assessment helps identify what is working and where improvement may be needed. Change management provides a process for putting those improvements into practice and sustaining them over time.

Source: Business Insights. 5 Critical Steps in the Change Management Process.
https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/change-management-process

Our Mission and Priorities

Our Mission

Student Affairs supports the academic success of all UCLA students, fosters their intellectual, personal, social and professional development in preparation for the entirety of their lives and contributes to enhancing the quality of campus life, the educational environment and our students' relationship with the broader UCLA family, including alumni.

Student Affairs Key Priorities

I. Commitment to Academic Persistence and Excellence
Student Affairs engages the whole student in multiple dimensions of campus life at UCLA, harnessing the curiosity, intrigue and discovery that occurs within the many environments that promote teaching and learning.

II. Pursuit of Life-long Learning and Innovation
Learning is a continuing process, and is embodied in all aspects of UCLA before, during and after class. Student Affairs is a conduit and a platform for students to explore and transform their passions into life-long commitments to creative problem solving, entrepreneurialism and service.

III. Cultivate Inclusive Communities
Fostering a sense of belonging is critical for every Bruin. Student Affairs aims to empower all Bruins to play their own important role in building this diverse and inclusive campus community where the richness of our diversity is honored and where each and every student can thrive at UCLA.

IV. Champion Health and Wellbeing
In order for Bruins to succeed in any of the other priorities, they first must secure a sense of wellbeing. Caring for oneself and others transcends individual wellbeing to cultivate a culture of positive and meaningful purpose. Therefore, we foster a robust, vibrant and healthy campus.

V. Leadership for Transformative Impact
While each generation of Bruins may differ, UCLA Student Affairs provides students the opportunities to lead, challenge the status quo and create transformative impact.



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Understanding What Helps Students Thrive

Assessment helps us understand the experiences, programs, and support services that contribute to student success, belonging, student development, and well-being. By intentionally collecting and using evidence, we can identify what is working, where improvements are needed, and how to allocate resources in ways that best support students. Assessment is not simply about collecting data; it is about using evidence to better understand and enhance the programs, services, and experiences that help students thrive.

Assessment and data empower us to align our organizational effectiveness initiatives, inspire philanthropy, influence strategic resource and workforce planning, and enhance effective communication.

Effective assessment begins with a clear plan, not with a survey or other data collection tool. Before collecting data, programs should establish a foundation for what they are trying to achieve and why. This includes:

- Defining clear program goals
- Identifying the student and/or operational outcomes expected as a result of the program
- Determining how those outcomes will be measured
- Establishing what evidence will indicate success
- Planning when, how, and by whom data will be collected
- Considering how results will be analyzed, disaggregated, and used

Starting with an assessment plan helps ensure that the evidence collected is connected to program goals and can actually be used to inform decisions. The assessment plan serves as a roadmap for the work. Assessment should help answer meaningful questions about a program, not result in collecting data for data's sake.

Start small. Programs do not need to assess every activity or outcome at once. Begin with an outcome that is meaningful to your program and where the findings can inform a decision, improvement, or next step.

Assessment Planning Resource: Use the Assessment Plan Template to document your goals, outcomes, measures, success criteria, and assessment timeline.

Recommended timing: Complete your assessment plan during the program planning phase, before data collection begins. Early planning helps ensure that your outcomes, measures, and success criteria align with your program goals and provide meaningful evidence for decision-making.

Building a Shared Culture of Assessment

Student Affairs is working toward a shared approach to assessment through common language, shared planning tools, and consistent assessment practices. This approach allows departments to assess their unique contributions while creating opportunities to understand, communicate, and demonstrate the collective impact of Student Affairs on student learning, success, belonging, development, and well-being.

The resources referenced throughout this guide, including the Shared Language Guide, Assessment Plan Template, and Assessment Operationalization Plan, are designed to support a consistent approach to assessment across Student Affairs.

Equity-Minded Assessments

The assessment cycle is a continuous process that begins with defining program goals and intended outcomes, followed by identifying appropriate measures, collecting evidence, engaging in analysis and sense-making, using findings to inform improvement, and evaluating progress over time.

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) recommends that practitioners take the following actions when creating assessments:

- Use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for assessment effort.
- Include student perspectives and determine next steps with these perspectives in mind.
- Increase transparency in assessment results and actions taken.
- Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated.
- Make evidence-based changes that address opportunity gaps that are context-specific.



Source: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Equity in Assessment. https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/equity/

Plan and Identify Outcomes

Begin by clarifying what your program, service, or initiative is trying to accomplish. **Program goals** reflect the overall purpose and priorities of the program, while **outcomes** describe the specific changes expected for students or improvements the program seeks to make. Existing data, student feedback, identified needs, and other evidence can help inform these conversations.

Develop goals and outcomes with program staff and, when appropriate, students and other partners. Consider how they align with Student Affairs priorities.

Programs may have several goals that reflect the full scope of their work, but **you do not need to assess everything at once.** Consider what is most important to understand and what is realistic based on your program's capacity and workload. For an initial assessment plan, we generally recommend focusing on no more than three outcomes. Other outcomes can be assessed over time as priorities and capacity allow.

(Coming soon!) New to assessment or need a refresher? The Shared Language Guide establishes a common language for assessment across Student Affairs. It provides common definitions, key concepts, and foundational distinctions to support consistent assessment practices, strengthen communication, and enhance understanding of assessment processes

Student and Operational Outcomes

There are two types of outcomes to consider: **Student Outcomes** and **Operational Outcomes**. Together, they describe the impact your program seeks to have on students and how the program will strengthen its work to support that impact.

	What it is	Example
Operational Outcomes	Describe what the program, service, or initiative will accomplish or improve to strengthen its effectiveness, reach, delivery, or responsiveness to student needs.	The program will increase student awareness of and access to well-being resources.
Student Outcomes	Describe what students will learn, feel, experience, or be able to do as a result of engaging with a program, service, or initiative.	Students will feel more confident navigating campus resources that support their academic and personal success.

Developing Outcomes Tip Sheet
Need help writing outcomes? This tip sheet provides practical guidance and examples for developing clear, measurable student, student learning, and operational outcomes that align with your program goals.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

For activities and programs with a learning component, you can use Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). SLOs are a type of student outcome that focuses on what students will learn or be able to demonstrate as a result of participating. They are typically written in terms of observable knowledge, skills, or behaviors.

Bloom's Taxonomy can help you develop SLOs by providing action verbs that describe different levels of learning. As you write your SLOs, use the Bloom's Taxonomy Verb Chart to select measurable verbs that align with the cognitive skills you expect students to demonstrate after participating in your program. Check out Bloom's Taxonomy Verb Chart.

	What it is	Example
Student Learning Outcomes	Examine what students will learn or be able to demonstrate as a result of a program or service and describe observable, measurable actions.	Students will be able to apply at least two stress-management techniques to support their personal well-being.

Applying SMART Criteria

Effective outcomes should be:

	What it is	Guiding Questions
Strategic/Specific	Reflects on important dimensions of what your area seeks to accomplish (i.e., programmatic or capacity-building priorities).	What does your program/area hope to accomplish?
Measurable	Includes a standard or benchmark to be met.	Did you establish benchmarks? Have you set measurable standards?
Achievable	Challenging enough that achievement would mean significant progress—a "stretch" for the organization.	Does your program/area have the capacity/resources to achieve this goal?
Realistic	Is not overly challenging and takes resources, capacity, and execution into consideration; it is possible to track progress and worth the time and energy to do so.	Is the goal (and plan for achieving it) realistic? Does your objective reflect the population of focus?
Time bound	Includes a clear timeline/deadline	Did you establish a deadline or timeframe?

A note about benchmarks: Programs may use previous results, established standards, comparison data, or program priorities to identify a meaningful benchmark. When no baseline exists, initial assessment findings can be used to establish one.



Tip: When using SAIRO's Assessment Plan template, your outcome statement does not need to capture every SMART element in one sentence. The assessment plan is designed to help you identify the measures, targets, and timeline needed to guide your assessment efforts.

Putting it Together: An Example in Practice

Assessment Plan Component	Example
Program Goal	Support students' financial well-being and access to basic needs resources.
Student Outcome	Students who participate in the workshop will be able to identify resources that can help address their basic needs.
Student Affairs Priority Area	Champion Health and Well-Being
Measure & Method	% of participants who can identify at least two relevant resources, measured through a brief post-program survey.
Success Criteria	At least 80% of respondents will be able to identify two or more relevant basic needs resources.
Finding	72% of participants identified at least two resources.
Use of Results	Strengthen how resources are introduced during the program and reassess the outcome next quarter.

Collecting Data

Once goals and outcomes have been established, identify the evidence needed to determine whether those outcomes are occurring. Measures should be selected because they provide meaningful evidence related to an outcome.

Before creating a new data collection tool, consider whether existing data can answer your assessment question. When new data are needed, select a method that is appropriate for the outcome, population, and intended use of the findings.

Types of Data

Knowing the different data types can help identify what information should be collected to enhance understanding of student experiences.

	Purpose:	Source examples:
Quantitative Data	Provide numerical information that can be used to describe patterns, frequencies, differences, or changes.	Surveys, student counts, utilization counts, student records.
Qualitative Data	Provide descriptive information that can help explore experiences, perspectives, context, and why particular patterns may be occurring.	Focus groups, interviews (one-on-one, structured or semi-structured), observations, open-ended survey questions, analysis of written feedback.

Quantitative and qualitative methods can provide different kinds of information. Quantitative data can show patterns, trends, or differences, while qualitative data can help explain students' experiences and provide context for what we see in the numbers. Depending on the assessment question, using both may provide a fuller picture.

Using Existing Data

Not every assessment requires new data collection. Before developing a new survey, focus group, or other assessment tool, consider whether existing institutional or program-level data can help answer your assessment question. Existing data can provide context, identify areas for further exploration, establish baselines, or complement program-level assessment findings.

Institutional Data

Institutional data can provide a broader view of student experiences and outcomes beyond students who participate in a specific program or service. Programs can use these data to understand student needs, identify patterns, establish context or baselines for assessment.

- University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) offers an in-depth examination of the undergraduate experience, including educational experiences, student well-being, plans, and aspirations, satisfaction with campus culture, time use, participation in community service, involvement in academic activities, student life and development, access to courses and services, and most recently, housing and food insecurity.
- First Destination Survey (FDS) is administered at UCLA every year. This survey provides comprehensive data that can be used to inform and shape career expectations of current undergraduate, new alumni, and prospective students on information about post-graduate plans for employment and continuing education, quality of post-graduate readiness, Career Center utilization and internship placement.
- National College Health Assessment (NCHA) collects data on attitudes, beliefs, and health behaviors of a random sample of UCLA students with content on health and wellness, campus health behavior, safety, preventive care and insurance behavior, mental wellness, and sexual behavior.
- Entering Student Survey (ESS) provides baseline data about our new student population and includes topics on past activities and engagement, anticipated activities and engagement, skills and abilities, interaction with others, health and wellbeing, campus climate, finances/basic needs, background and characteristics.

Additional resources are available via our campus partners and the UC Information Center.

- Academic Budget and Planning (APB) provides undergraduate admissions, enrollment, degrees, and program completion data.
- UCLA Graduate Education website provides a snapshot of graduate admissions, enrollment, and student outcomes.
- UC Information Center provides system-wide data on topics such as Basic Needs, undergraduate and graduate student experience, admissions and transfers, and student financial support.

Example of how institutional surveys have informed decision-making in Student Affairs:

> Utilizing Basic Needs data on housing, food, and mental health from the UC Undergraduate and UC Graduate Experience Surveys, Students with Dependents (SwD) shaped new programming and partnerships. These insights led to the creation of bi-weekly support groups with Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS), a supply initiative providing diapers and formula, and re-envisioning the Little Bruin Wishes campaign to support students with dependents during the holidays and beyond.
>
> "Having access to [...] population-specific quantitative data is very helpful and supports building a case for community needs," shares Ishia Orozco-Barajas, Program Director of the Students with Dependents Program .

Program-Level Data

Programs often collect data as part of their day-to-day operations that can be used for assessment. Existing program data may include:

- Check-in or kiosk data
- Attendance and participation data
- Program registration or RSVP data
- Service utilization data
- Intake or application data
- Appointment or advising data
- Previous program evaluations or student feedback

These data can help programs understand who they are reaching, how students engage with programs and services, and patterns in participation or utilization over time. When appropriate and available, program-level data may also be disaggregated to better understand whether patterns differ across student populations.

Program-Level Assessment

When existing data are not sufficient to assess an intended outcome or answer an assessment question, programs may need to collect additional data. **The data collection method should be selected based on what you are trying to understand or measure**, the population of interest, and how the findings will be used.

Start with the outcome, then select the measure. Avoid selecting a method, such as a survey, before determining what evidence is needed. Depending on the outcome, programs may use surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, student records, interactive feedback activities, or a combination of methods.

Consider whose perspectives are represented in the data. In some cases, understanding the experiences of students who do not participate in or access a program or service may provide important information about awareness, access, barriers, or unmet needs.

Data Collection Resources
Visit SAIRO's Assessment and Data Resources Hub for guides and resources on survey design and qualitative and quantitative data collection.



Assessment support can be requested using SAIRO's request form.

Before Collecting New Data

Before beginning data collection, confirm that your assessment plan addresses the following:

- **Outcome:** What student or operational outcome are you assessing?
- **Existing Evidence:** Does information already exist that can help assess the outcome?
- **Measure:** What evidence will demonstrate whether the outcome occurred?
- **Method:** What data collection method is appropriate for the outcome and why?
- **Success Criteria:** What will indicate success?
- **Population:** Whose experiences or outcomes need to be represented?
- **Logistics:** Who will collect the data, when will it be collected, and where will it be stored?
- **Analysis:** How will the data be analyzed and, when appropriate, disaggregated?
- **Use of Results:** How will findings inform decisions or program improvement.

Common Data Collection Methods in Student Affairs

Surveys	Allows for a larger outreach of students. Qualitative information is captured through open-ended, free-form questions that allow students to type in their thoughts and experiences rather than having to select from a pre-determined set of answers.
Focus Groups	Facilitated discussion with small groups (generally 5-6 students) that explore a topic in detail, providing insights into shared experiences and perspectives.
Interviews	Direct one-on-one conversations to gather in-depth information about student experiences, perspectives, and opinions about specific topics. This method is best used for hard-to-reach and/or vulnerable student populations or sensitive issues.
Questions Wall method	Involves creating a physical wall where students can write down their questions, ideas, etc., or respond to specific topics or inquiries.
Analysis of Student Records	Analyzing student records involves assessing demographic information and student characteristics, student success data, etc., to identify gaps or areas of concern.
Systematic Observations	Involves observing student behavior and interactions in various settings in a structured way to reduce bias and increase the reliability of data collection. Systematic observation provides information about student engagement and participation.

Moving from planning to action? The Assessment Operationalization Plan can help identify timelines and roles/responsibilities needed to carry out your assessment plan.

Selecting a Survey Tool

If a survey is the appropriate method for your assessment, consider the complexity of the survey, the information being collected, respondent management needs, and how the resulting data will be used when selecting a platform.

MyUCLA - Best for: Collecting small amounts of data and for non-complex surveys.	
Pros: • Allows for the collection of UIDs and UCLA emails without having to ask students to input the information. • Behind secure, internal site	**Cons:** • Not ideal for anonymous data collection. • Output often requires additional cleaning compared to other survey tools. • Does not have great respondent management features or streamlined survey experience.
Google/MS Forms - Best for: Collecting small amounts of data and for non-complex surveys.	
Pros: • Requires minimal training to use because of its simple interface. • Offers a good variety of survey question types. • It has great collaboration features.	**Cons:** • It is difficult to customize questions to respondent answers (i.e., limited branching logic). • Limited options for controlling types of access.
Qualtrics - Best for: Enhanced survey management and analysis; creating customizable surveys to reduce survey fatigue.	
Pros: • Streamlined survey experience (i.e., logic branching that allows customization of the questions students see). • Improved respondent management (i.e., sending reminders, tracking response rates, etc.). • Allows for data analysis within the tool (i.e., text analysis, statistical tools, etc.). • Reporting capabilities. • More advanced collaborative features, such as detailed control over user permissions/data sharing.	**Cons:** • Has a learning curve (SAIRO team is available to assist with survey design).

Analyzing Data

Once data have been collected, review and analyze the evidence in relation to the outcome and success criteria identified in your assessment plan. The type of analysis will depend on the assessment question and data collected and may include descriptive statistics, comparisons over time, pre/post comparisons, qualitative themes, or other appropriate approaches.

Analysis should help answer: What did we learn, did we achieve the intended outcome, and what do the findings suggest for our program or service?

Disaggregating Data

When appropriate, examine assessment results across relevant student groups to understand whether experiences or outcomes differ across populations. Looking beyond overall averages can help identify patterns, strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement that may not be visible in aggregate results.

Consider disaggregating data by characteristics that are relevant to the outcome and program, such as:

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- First-generation status
- Pell Grant status
- Transfer status
- International student status
- Class level
- Program participation or level of engagement
- Other populations specifically served by the program

Disaggregation should be intentional rather than automatic. Select groups that can help answer your assessment questions and inform program decisions. When reporting results, consider sample size and student privacy, particularly for small groups.

Equity-Minded Sense Making

Review assessment findings to identify areas of strength, differences in student experiences or outcomes, and opportunities for the program or service to adapt. Equity-minded sense making can help teams move beyond identifying differences or opportunity gaps to asking what may be contributing to them. This includes considering the practices, policies, processes, and conditions that may shape student experiences and outcomes (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcolm-Piquex, 2020, p. 61).

- What patterns or differences do you see in the data?
- Which student groups appear to have different experiences or outcomes?
- What program practices, policies, processes, or conditions might contribute to these differences?
- What additional information is needed to better understand these patterns?
- Whose perspectives may be missing from the data?
- What questions could help you develop a deeper understanding?
- How might these findings inform program improvement, goal setting, or future assessment?

Remember that no single characteristic fully represents a student's experience. Students hold multiple identities and may experience programs and services differently depending on their circumstances. When interpreting findings, avoid assuming that differences are caused by a single identity or characteristic.

Optional Technique to Dig Deeper: 5 Whys

When assessment findings reveal an unexpected pattern, gap, or area for improvement, the 5 Whys can help teams explore contributing factors before identifying potential solutions. It encourages teams to look beyond an immediate problem or individual case and consider the processes, practices, and conditions that may be shaping the finding.

1. **Define the finding or problem.** Develop a focused statement describing the pattern, gap, or issue identified through the assessment and ensure the group has a shared understanding of it.
2. **Ask why it may be occurring**. Identify potential factors contributing to the finding.
3. **Continue asking "Why?"** For each potential factor, ask why it occurs and continue exploring underlying factors. Five rounds of questioning can be a useful guide, but the goal is to reach a meaningful underlying issue rather than complete exactly five rounds.
4. **Identify factors the program can address.** Consider which practices, processes, policies, or conditions are within the program's ability to influence or change.
5. **Determine next steps.** Use what you learned to identify potential improvements, additional questions, or areas that require further assessment.

The 5 Whys technique should be used as an exploratory tool rather than as proof of causation. Additional data or student perspectives may be needed to confirm why a particular pattern is occurring.

Additional Resource: Organizational Process Improvement. 5 Whys Exercise. https://media.wcwpds.wisc.edu/PDSA%20Online%20Toolkit/Plan_Problem%20Exploration_Test%20Selection/5%20Whys%20Exercise.pdf

Using Results and Implementing Changes

Assessment is most valuable when findings are used to inform decisions and strengthen programs and services. After analyzing and interpreting results, consider what the findings suggest should be maintained, improved, changed, or explored further.

Not every finding requires a change. Assessment may provide evidence that a program or practice is working as intended, identify an opportunity for improvement, or raise additional questions that require further assessment or student input.

When findings indicate an opportunity for improvement, develop a clear action plan **that identifies:**

- The key finding or insight
- The action or improvement to be implemented
- Who is responsible for implementing the action
- A timeline for implementation
- How you will determine whether the action was effective

When determining next steps, consider what is within the program's ability to influence and whether the proposed action is supported by the available evidence. Findings should be connected back to the program goals and outcomes established during the planning stage.

Assessing Impact of Change

Assessment is an ongoing cycle of learning and improvement. After an improvement or change has been implemented, determine whether it had the intended effect.

Return to the outcomes, measures, and success criteria established in your assessment plan. Depending on the change being assessed, this may involve comparing results over time, collecting follow-up data, examining changes in student experiences or outcomes, or gathering additional student feedback.

Consider:

- Did we achieve or make progress toward the intended outcome?
- What changed after the improvement was implemented?
- Did students experience the change as intended?
- Did results differ across student populations?
- What worked well and should be maintained?
- What may need further improvement or exploration?
- What did we learn that should inform the next assessment cycle?

The findings from this stage should inform future planning and assessment. Programs may refine an approach, continue a successful practice, identify a new area for exploration, or revise goals, outcomes, measures, or strategies as needs evolve.

Additional Resources

- Assessment Plan Template
- Assessment Operationalization Plan
- Outcomes Tip Sheet
- Data Resources at A Glance
- Survey Best Practices Tip Sheet
- Qualitative Data Collection Guide
- Quantitative Data Collection Guide
- Assessment and Data Resources Hub
- Shared Language Guide (coming soon)
- Assessment Training Resources (coming soon)

For additional questions about the assessment process, please contact SAIRO at sairo@saonet.ucla.edu.