

**THE DIVISION OF UNDERGRADUATE AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT**

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**"ASK THE ASSESSMENT LADY"**

**Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.  
North Carolina State University  
Division of Undergraduate Affairs**

In this version of the Undergraduate Affairs Assessment newsletter, a new column is introduced in the form of a feature: "Ask the Assessment Lady." Since I increasingly hear that phrase as I proceed across campus from meeting to workshop, I decided to capitalize on it. (Thank you to whoever first made that statement.) Thus, the following are questions that have been posed to and answered by the "Assessment Lady." I hope the introduction of this column proves of value to you. In future issues, I plan to incorporate those questions asked and answered by the Undergraduate Academic Program Review Facilitators, so that readers can benefit from the multiple perspectives of our on-campus, nationally- and internationally- recognized experts.

**1) Can you over assess? How can you tell?**

In answering this question, it is important to keep in mind the reasons why one engages in assessment. When done well, assessment can

- 1) reinforce or emphasize the mission of your unit
- 2) modify, shape, and improve programs and/or performance (formative)
- 3) critique a program's quality or value compared to the program's previously defined principles (summative)
- 4) inform planning
- 5) inform decision making
- 6) evaluate programs (not personnel)
- 7) assist in the request for additional funds from the University and external community
- 8) assist in meeting accreditation requirements, models of best practices, and national benchmarks

If you are using assessment in this manner and accomplishing the purpose of assessment, then you can't over assess. You can, however, over collect

meaningless data. As you know though, doing that would not be considered engaging in assessment.

**2) Who is responsible for assessment in our unit/program?**

Everyone is responsible for assessment in his/her own unit and program and, thus, everyone has the right to pose and raise questions about each element of the entire process.

**3) How available are you (“Assessment Lady”) to inform us on developing a classroom-level assessment plan?**

I will make myself as available as my schedule will allow. That means that I will respond to your unit’s and your individual assessment questions and concerns as quickly as I am able.

There are expert assessment facilitators here on-campus for you to consult.

Those undergraduate program review facilitators can be found at

[http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic\\_programs/uapr/UAPRindx.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_programs/uapr/UAPRindx.html)

They all have unique areas of expertise, yet they are all well-versed and well accomplished in all processes of assessment.

**4) How do we organize our various objectives into meaningful and manageable outcomes, while remaining friendly with the rest of our program/unit faculty and staff?**

As you are aware, any discussions that revolve around personal and professional values can become heated if care is not taken to create a safe and creative environment for the exchange of ideas and suggestions. Thus, it will be in your program/unit’s best interest to appeal to each of your faculty and staff’s professional ethics in order to create such an environment when engaging in outcomes conversations.

**5) Should students be a part of the discussion of defining program outcomes?**

The answer depends on whether your unit/program culture values student input and is ready for it. Some NC State academic departments have constructed outcomes and then sent them to their graduating seniors to see if the students agree that those are or should be outcomes of the program. This process can prove to be very fruitful if your unit is willing and ready to address the student feedback.

**6) What is an acceptable timeline for assessment? Do you always decide on the timeline or can the “circumstances” of your assessment decide?**

Assessment is cyclical and it is iterative. As such, time must be a flexible part of the equation, but care must be taken that it is not used as an excuse for not engaging in assessment. Your assessment results will drive many decisions about your program and your assessment process. Thus, you should pay attention to what your data are saying.

For example, it may be that while you had planned to assess a certain set of outcomes one year and another set the following year, your data may say that you haven't really assessed the first set of outcomes at all or that your evidence of your achievement of one or more of those outcomes is inconclusive. Thus, you would be wise to pay attention to those data and revise your assessment plan for the following year. You may need to re-assess the outcome from the first set, re-define the outcome and re-assess it, or choose a different methodology and re-assess it.

Another example is that you may have chosen an outcome for which you need a year to understand what the results look like and, therefore, you will need time to develop the criteria and the assessment methods. Then you will need the following year to pilot the criteria and methods. The result is that while you want to assess an outcome in year one, you may not get to it until year three. However, if you are engaged in this process, you are engaged in assessment.

**7) Would someone be available to be the “outsider” in our group the next time we tackle language and definition issues related to outcomes and assessment?**

Defining a common language and a shared conceptual understanding of assessment is not an easy task. However, engagement in assessment is not an easy undertaking. It takes conversation, understanding, a willingness to question and be questioned, and time. In order to facilitate those conversations, an understanding and agreement of shared definitions and concepts is extremely valuable.

While some institutions struggle to complete the task of defining a common language and a shared conceptual understanding of assessment, North Carolina State University has already defined one. It can be found at [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/governance/Ad\\_hoc/CUPR/retreat/concepts.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/governance/Ad_hoc/CUPR/retreat/concepts.html).

If your unit requires additional assistance with language issues, there are other people upon whom to call. Those undergraduate program review facilitators can be found at [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic\\_programs/uapr/UAPRindx.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_programs/uapr/UAPRindx.html)

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**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.  
Director of Assessment

**Division of Undergraduate Affairs**

**North Carolina State University**

126 Leazar Hall, Box 7105

Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7105

Phone: 919-515-6433 Fax 919-515-4416

[Marilee\\_Bresciani@ncsu.edu](mailto:Marilee_Bresciani@ncsu.edu)