Glossary of Common Assessment Terms

The assessment process can be confusing, but the terminology can be even more so. Here is a list of commonly used assessment terms you should know. Even though the same concept may be termed and/or defined differently depending on the setting (e.g., within your college/department, as used by your discipline-specific accreditor, in assessment literature), we will choose these terms and definitions to be used at FSU for institutional assessment. Consistency is key to assessment!

Term	Definition
Assessment	Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. (Banta & Palomba, 2015, p. 2; Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 4).
Assessment Process	A continuous cycle of: • Establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning. • Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes. • Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations. • Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning. (Suskie, 2009, p. 4.).
Numeric Target	A criterion-referenced objective data point against which future performance is compared. When setting a numeric target, the guiding question is “In order for you and your colleagues to deem your educational program effective in helping students achieve the learning goal, how many of them need to demonstrate performance at what level?”
Capstone Courses and Projects	Whether they’re called “senior capstones” or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of college to create a project that integrates and applies what they’ve learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio, or an exhibit of artwork.
Criterion-Referenced	A test in which the results can be used to determine a student's progress toward mastery of a content area. Performance is compared to an expected level of mastery in a content area rather than to other students' scores. The "criterion" is the standard of performance established as the passing score for the test. Scores have meaning in terms of what the student knows or can do, rather than how the test-taker compares to a reference or norm group.
Direct Assessment of Learning	Direct methods of assessment are generally thought to be quantitative in nature. In terms of data collection, direct and indirect methods complement one another. Direct methods of collecting assessment data “require students to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself” (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 11). When you ask students to respond to questions on an exam, you are using the direct method of assessment. Scoring performance on tests, term papers, or the execution of lab skills, would all be examples of direct assessment of learning. Direct assessment of learning can occur within a course (e.g., performance on a series of tests) or could occur across courses or years (comparing writing scores from sophomore to senior year).

Embedded Assessment	"A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process. Often used for assessment purposes, classroom assignments are evaluated to assign students a grade. Can assess individual student performance or aggregate the information to provide information about the course or program; can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative. Example: as part of a course, expecting each senior to complete a research paper that is graded for content and style, but is also assessed for advanced ability to locate and evaluate Web-based information (as part of a college-wide outcome to demonstrate information literacy)". (Leskes, 2002).
Evaluation (*corresponds to the Analysis of Results field in the IE Portal*)	Using assessment data to understand (level of success or value), judge, and/or improve current knowledge, services, and/or practices. (Suskie, 2009). Both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of progress towards and attainment of project goals based on assessment results versus pre-determined numeric targets/benchmarks. Using collected information to make informed decisions about continued instruction, programs, activities.
Focus Groups	A qualitative approach to gathering data via small groups of people, typically with prepared questions.
Formative Assessment	Formative assessment happens during the learning process and is described by Bailey & Jakicic (2012) as "an activity designed to give meaningful feedback to students and teachers and to improve professional practice and student achievement" (p.14). Formative assessment is often done at the beginning or during a program, thus providing the opportunity for immediate evidence for student learning in a particular course or at a particular point in a program. Classroom assessment is one of the most common formative assessment techniques.
General Education Assessment	Process that measures our General Education curriculum's effectiveness through the systematic collection and evaluation of information about student learning. At FSU, there are 15 General Education learning outcomes that are developed, assessed, and improved across several General Education areas (more at CoreFSU).
Indirect Assessment of Learning	Indirect methods are generally thought to be qualitative. Indirect assessments use perceptions, reflections, or secondary evidence to make inferences about student learning. For example, surveys of employers, students' self-assessments, focus groups, satisfaction surveys, and admissions to graduate schools can all provide indirect evidence of learning. Indirect methods of collecting assessment data can be "helpful in deepening interpretations of student learning" (Maki, 2010, p. 213).
Learning Outcomes (*aka Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes, aka SLOs*)	"Outcomes are goals that refer to a destination rather than the path taken to get there - the end rather than the means, the outcome rather than the process. Learning outcomes are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that students take with them from a learning experience" (Suskie, 2009, pp. 116-117). (Note: some professional organizations and accreditors may refer to these with different terms, such as objectives, indicators, abilities, or competencies.)
Learning Objectives (*aka Course-Level Learning Objectives*)	Describe expected learning that takes place in specific courses. Although aligned with, and supportive of, learning outcomes, course-level learning objectives are 'narrower' than program-level SLOs. Because an academic program should be greater than the sum of its parts (courses), program-level SLOs combine course-level objectives into an amplified, deepened, cohesive, integrated whole.

Mapping	A process that allows us to visually represent what is taught to students, where and how. Narrowly speaking, the curriculum map is a chart that shows in which specific courses various knowledge and skill sets are initially taught, further developed and reinforced, and finally mastered. After students have been provided sufficient opportunity to develop each SLO, evidence of learning is collected. In order to determine if students have indeed gained the desired competencies, each one is assessed using appropriate assignments and methods. The mapping process: • documents how learning is scaffolded across the curriculum, • reveals gaps and redundancies (if any) in the curriculum, • helps design appropriate assignments, • improves communication and encourages reflective practice, • ultimately, benefits student learning experience and outcomes.
Norm Referenced Tests	A test in which a student or a group's performance is compared to that of a norm group. The student or group scores will not fall evenly on either side of the median established by the original test takers. The results are relative to the performance of an external group and are designed to be compared with the norm group providing a performance standard. Often used to measure and compare students, schools, districts, and states on the basis of norm-established scales of achievement.
Performance-Based Assessment	Performance-based assessment is a test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting. Assessment of the performance is done using a rubric, or analytic scoring guide to aid in objectivity.
Portfolio	A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selecting its contents and include information about the performance criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation. It should include representative work, providing documentation of the learner's performance and a basis for evaluation of the student's progress. Portfolios may include a variety of demonstrations of learning and have been gathered in the form of a physical collection of materials, videos/audios, reflective journals, etc. An ePortfolio is a collection of student work that has been electronically stored providing a chronological account of their learning through a range of artifacts to demonstrate progress toward or achievement of learning outcomes. (Maki, 2010, p. 170).
Program Outcome (*specifically at FSU*)	Each educational program at FSU develops, tracks, and improves Program Outcomes (POs). As opposed to Student Learning Outcomes, which focus on the knowledge and skills that students should learn, POs are non-curricular goals – typically aimed at improving various aspects of student success, program vitality, and faculty excellence. When choosing new POs and/or improving their assessment processes, departments should select one from the recommended list.
Reliability	How consistent an assessment instrument performs over time. The instrument should provide similar results over time with similar populations in similar circumstances to be considered 'reliable'.
Rubric	"A scoring guide: a list or chart that describes the criteria that someone will use to evaluate or grade completed student assignments." (Suskie, 2009, pp. 137). Rubric is an evaluative tool that explicitly represents the performance expectations for an assignment or piece of work. A rubric divides the assigned work into component parts and provides clear descriptions of the characteristics of the work associated with each component, at varying levels of mastery. Rubrics can be used for a wide array of assignments: papers, projects, oral presentations, artistic performances, group projects, etc. Rubrics can be used as scoring or grading guides, to provide formative feedback to support and guide ongoing learning efforts, or both.

Summative Assessment	Summative assessment occurs at the end of the learning process and "is used to give a grade or provide a final measure of students results" (Bailey & Jakicic, p. 14). Summative assessment is comprehensive in nature, provides accountability and is used to check the level of learning at the end of the program. For example, if upon completion of a program students will obtain the knowledge to pass an accreditation test, taking the test would be summative in nature since it is based on the cumulative learning experience. Program-level SLOs often reflect the cumulative nature of the learning that takes place in a program and are therefore assessed at the end of the program to ensure students have met the program-level SLOs.
Validity	An assessment is valid when it accurately reflects the learning it was designed to measure; it measures the desired performance and appropriate conclusions can be drawn from the results.
Value Added *(aka Pre/Post Test)*	The increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or undergraduate education. Can either focus on the individual student (how much better a student can write, for example, at the end than at the beginning) or on a cohort of students (whether senior papers demonstrate more sophisticated writing skills – in the aggregate – than freshmen papers). To measure value-added, a baseline measurement is needed for comparison. The baseline measure can be from the same sample of students (longitudinal design) or from a different sample (cross-sectional).
VALUE Rubrics	Developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for program or institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. https://www.usna.edu/Academics/Academic-Dean/Assessment/All_Rubrics.pdf

* Excerpted from the Learning Assessment Research Consortium (LARC) Assessment Modules housed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)