Indirect Measures of Student Learning

Why use indirect measures of student learning?

- To complement direct measures.
- To provide evidence of subsequent success, satisfaction, and value added.
- To obtain information based on stakeholders’ perspective (employers, transfer institutions, alumni, etc.)
- To provide evidence of validity of competencies/learning outcomes and student attainment.

How are indirect measures used?

1. Identify common competencies/expected learning outcomes in courses, disciplines-specific general education goals, and/or programs.
2. Establish program of systematic assessment using measures that are most appropriate to discipline or program.
3. Build in systematic review by discipline/program and include appropriate stakeholders.
4. Use the review/results to revise curriculum, and improve instruction or curriculum as indicated.

1. Course Progression and Success

Tracking the performance of students in the next course in a defined sequence is a useful way to determine how well competencies have been mastered. Assuming that curriculum is aligned well so that the competencies of the first class meet requirements for the second, this method can provide relevant information about how much students are really learning. It is particularly informative if the performance of students who tested directly into the course is compared with the performance of students who progressed from the previous course in the sequence.

Recent reports prepared by Institutional Research showing these data are available at: http://www.mdc.edu/ir/iremployees/curriculum2.htm

2. Transfer Student Success by Discipline/program

Information about transfer student success into the upper division by discipline can be used to assess the adequacy of the lower division curriculum and the level of student learning prior to transfer. It is particularly helpful when compared to the performance of native State University System (SUS) students who received their lower division instruction at the university.

Recent reports prepared by Institutional Research showing transfer student success are available at: http://www.mdc.edu/ir/iremployees/spotlt.htm
3. Job Placement Rates

Job placement rates by program can provide evidence of the relevancy of program curriculum as well as student attainment of expected learning outcomes.

Completion and placement data by program are currently available upon request from Institutional Research.

4. Student Surveys

Student surveys have become increasingly important tools for understanding the educational needs of students. When combined with other assessment instruments, many departments have successfully used surveys to produce important curricular and co-curricular information about student learning and educational experiences. Students are asked to reflect on what they have learned and how much the College has contributed to their abilities in specific general education areas in order to generate information for program improvement. Through this method, we can gain insight into how students experience courses, what they like and do not like about various instructional approaches, what is important about the classroom environment that facilitates or hinders learning, and the nature of assignments that foster student learning.

The Graduating Student Survey at MDC included learning outcomes questions and items specific to general education goals (RR No. 2004-10R).

MDC also participated in the national Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in Spring Term, 2004. Results available at: https://spsd.mdc.edu/das/mdcpfe/insteffect/default.aspx

5. Alumni Surveys

Alumni surveys are useful assessment tools for generating data about student preparation for professional work, program satisfaction, and curriculum relevancy. As an assessment supplement, alumni surveys provide departments with a variety of information that can highlight program areas that need to be expanded or enhanced.


6. Employer Surveys

Employer surveys can provide information about the curriculum, programs, and students that other forms of assessment cannot produce. Through surveys, programs traditionally seek employer satisfaction levels with the abilities and skills of recent graduates. Employers also assess programmatic characteristics by addressing the success of students in a continuously evolving job market. The advantages in using employer surveys include the ability to obtain
external data that cannot be produced on campus, and the responses are often useful to help students discern the relevance of educational experiences and programs.

7. **Student Focus Groups or Exit Interviews**

Focus groups and exit interviews can yield rich information about student learning, academic experiences, and opinions about the curriculum and instructional methods.

Most recently, the Director of Enrollment Management and Institutional Research conducted a series of focus groups with students in college preparatory English and reading, mathematics, and EAP classes. Students were asked to reflect on difficulties they experienced in these classes and how the College and faculty could help them be more successful in learning and meeting course objectives. In addition, focus groups were conducted with students who had transferred to FIU and University of Miami. An overview of the focus groups and results is available at: https://www.mdc.edu/eppa/enrollment_management.asp

8. **Curriculum and Syllabus Analysis**

Curriculum analysis provides a means to chart which courses will cover which objectives that have been defined for the general education, discipline area, or program. The chart then provides assurance to the department that, assuming certain sequences are taken by the student enrolled in a specific program or advancing through general education coursework, they will in fact have the opportunity to learn those objectives.

Syllabus analysis is an especially useful technique when multiple sections of a department course are offered by a variety of instructors. It provides assurance that each section will cover essential points without prescribing the specific teaching methods to be used in helping the students learn those objectives.

9. **External Reviewers**

Peer review of general education and academic programs is a widely accepted method for assessing curricular sequences, course development and delivery, and the effectiveness of instruction. Using external reviewers is a useful way of analyzing whether student achievement correlates appropriately with departmental goals and objectives. In numerous instances, recommendations initiated by skilled external reviewers have been instrumental in identifying program strengths and weaknesses leading to substantial curricular and program changes and improvements.