

Assessment & APR Quarterly

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Designing Assessment Retreats

Creating dedicated time to consider assessment and how it relates to other parts of your work can be a great way to integrate and sustain assessment and make it feel manageable for you and your team. Here are some ideas for helpful and meaningful assessment

Conduct a needs assessment first

Rather than having a retreat for the sake of having a retreat, first consider: what needs or goals will the retreat meet?

Have outcomes for your retreat

In addition to meeting one or more needs, what do you want to be the result(s) of your retreat—Outcomes for your area? Resource mapping? More technological skills? An entire plan?

Consider a distributed 'retreat'

Meeting for one hour a month can feel more manageable and less exhausting than taking an entire day to focus exclusively on assessment. It also has the benefit of sustaining a focus on assessment throughout the term or year.

Get buy-in from everyone involved

Assessment should benefit your staff and faculty as well as your students—make sure they are involved not only in the retreat, but also planning it if they want to be!

Assess the retreat itself

Whether you are doing a retreat for the first time or fifteenth time, it may not go as planned and there is always room for improvement! Assessing it can be as simple as a short survey.

Ensure follow-through

Whatever you decide as a result of the retreat, make sure the time and contributions of everyone involved are valued by completing what was started at the retreat and implementing whatever was created.

Steps for Learning Improvement

Looking to make a change to your curriculum, assessment, or co-curricular activities? Consider these high-level steps from Fulcher & Prendergast (2023) in Trends in Assessment, 2nd ed. (now available through [UNM University Libraries](#))!

1. Test the collective will to improve

If there is no commitment in the first place, doing the rest of this work is less likely to be worthwhile or successful.

2. Define vision

Vision can be defined as a specific outcome or set of outcomes.

3. Determine current status

Where are you now? What are your baselines for student performance/experience and the current learning or service environment?

4. Develop intervention(s)

These may include new courses, extracurricular experiences, pedagogical or service approaches, etc. They should affect the entire program, not just electives or subsets of course sections.

5. Implement intervention(s)

Consider using [implementation fidelity](#) to check effectiveness, but also weigh its benefits against more flexibility, which can increase autonomy and buy-in.

6. Reassess

Assess the status again as in step 3, ideally with the same measures/tools.

General Education Assignment Tips

If you are responsible for creating and collecting assignments being used for general education assessment, consider these tips to get the most out of the process and help your students demonstrate their skills!

Build assignments based on the NMHED rubric dimensions. Each skill has multiple dimensions under it, allowing for flexibility in which two dimensions are selected.

Include essential skills and their definitions in the assignment description. Students benefit from having an understanding of the skillset being gained and appreciate knowing what they are expected to demonstrate.

Communicate to students that GE assessment is taking place. Students can be motivated to do better on assignments (and demonstrate the true extent of their essential skill attainment) when they know that it will represent UNM as a whole.

Consider ways to include evidence of the learning process for the essential skill. These can include reflective components, preparatory work, or drafts of a final project. Some assignment results, such as quantitative answers, multiple-choice quizzes, and final art products, do not show direct evidence of the essential

Metacognition: Actively Facilitating Student Learning

Instructors can foster metacognitive skills within students by having them practice self-assessment activities throughout their learning process. Here are some examples of encouraging learners to think about their thinking and learn about their learning:

PLAN: Have students strategize on how a skill can be threaded into an assignment

PLAN: Have students discuss ways in which a theory/skill/conceptual knowledge is evidenced in real world application

PLAN: Have students map out their work (time, steps and quality) regarding a specific assignment

MONITOR: Have students look for terms in their work aligning with their learning and that they completed all of the requirements expected of their assignment

REFLECT: Have students identify skills/theories/conceptual knowledge in their peer's work

REFLECT: Have students think about what attributed to their final work/grade and if they define it as successful

OAAPR Workshops

GE Success Workshops (co-hosted with CTL)

Thursday, January 18 10-11am; Wednesday, March 20 3pm-4pm

Get the inside scoop on essential skills and rubrics that you can use and adapt for your General Education courses. The workshop will introduce you to the rubrics, give you strategies for adapting them for an assignment or activity, and help you incorporate metacognitive strategies within your course to help students be able to articulate the transferable skills they are learning.

Introduction to Data Visualization & Storytelling

Friday, February 9 10-11am

Learn ways to improve your communication of data and get your message across. This workshop is for anyone who works with data at any skill level and needs to present it to others in a visual format.

Tracking your Student Population

Friday, March 22 10-11am

For those who want help starting or growing their ability to track students internally within your program and/or department, we will cover in-house techniques as well as institutional data sources. Knowing your students can help you support their success.

[Find registration information on the OAAPR website.](#)

NMHEAR Alert

The [New Mexico Higher Education Assessment and Retention](#) conference is scheduled for Thursday, February 29 and Friday, March 1 at the Marriott Albuquerque. Come hear from staff and faculty across the state on how they are addressing curriculum, assessment, and retention at their institutions. Registration is open now!

Data Den

by Elizabeth Kerl

Observing Beyond Averages

Last fall I ran a workshop on guidance for small numbers, that felt lacking even to me. I've always been disappointed in how we handle 'outliers' in statistics by removing or ignoring them, but a recent workshop by Sarah Wu (Georgia Tech) and Vince Nix (West Texas A&M) through Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) offered an alternative I wish I had known about sooner.

Traditional hypothesis tests are focused on averages & p-values, but what about when you want to understand those who aren't the average, or what if something is significant but meaningless (like an effect size of 0.001%)? Typical hypothesis testing can't understand these questions.

Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM) offers an alternative to traditional hypothesis testing that is quickly gaining acceptance in biological and psychological spheres for analyzing data in a holistic way. The best part is the analysis package is [free](#).

OOM allows us to look at everyone in a sample and focuses on the effect size differences between each person so that every data point is maintained and not suppressed or removed. Even if there is not enough data to fit a model, the direction and magnitude of the differences are observable. This means finding dominant patterns but also observing alternative patterns for those who don't fit the dominant trends. More importantly, patterns or models don't just average everyone. Extreme values become apparent instead of driving a false average.

Interestingly, the presenters were originally using OOM as extra analysis after traditional hypothesis tests to provide more detail on effect sizes and individual differences. They now use the test exclusively since determining significance becomes unnecessary when more valuable information is present.

I'm still new to the idea myself, so if this is of interest, I encourage you to look into it more. My favorite article so far comes from [NIH](#). You can also find the book in which this was first proposed [online](#).



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