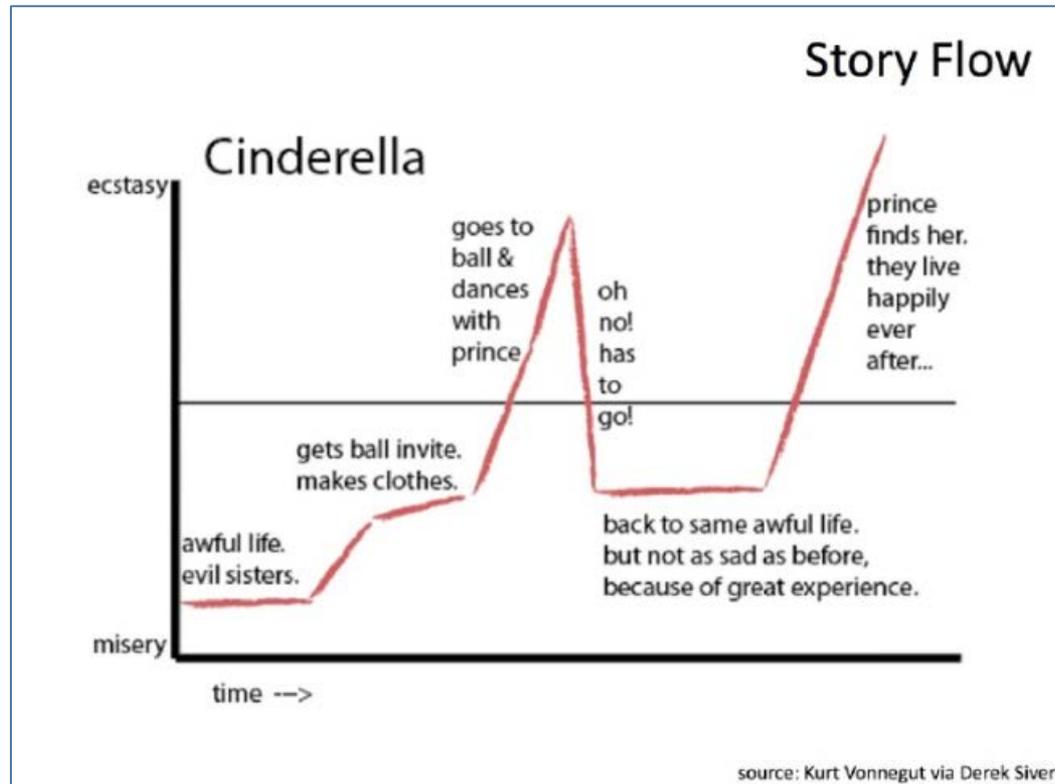


Writing Effective Reports



<https://visage.co/kurt-vonnegut-shows-us-shapes-stories/>

Assessment Workshop, May 2016
Liz Sanders, IRMA
Samantha Schenk, Student Affairs

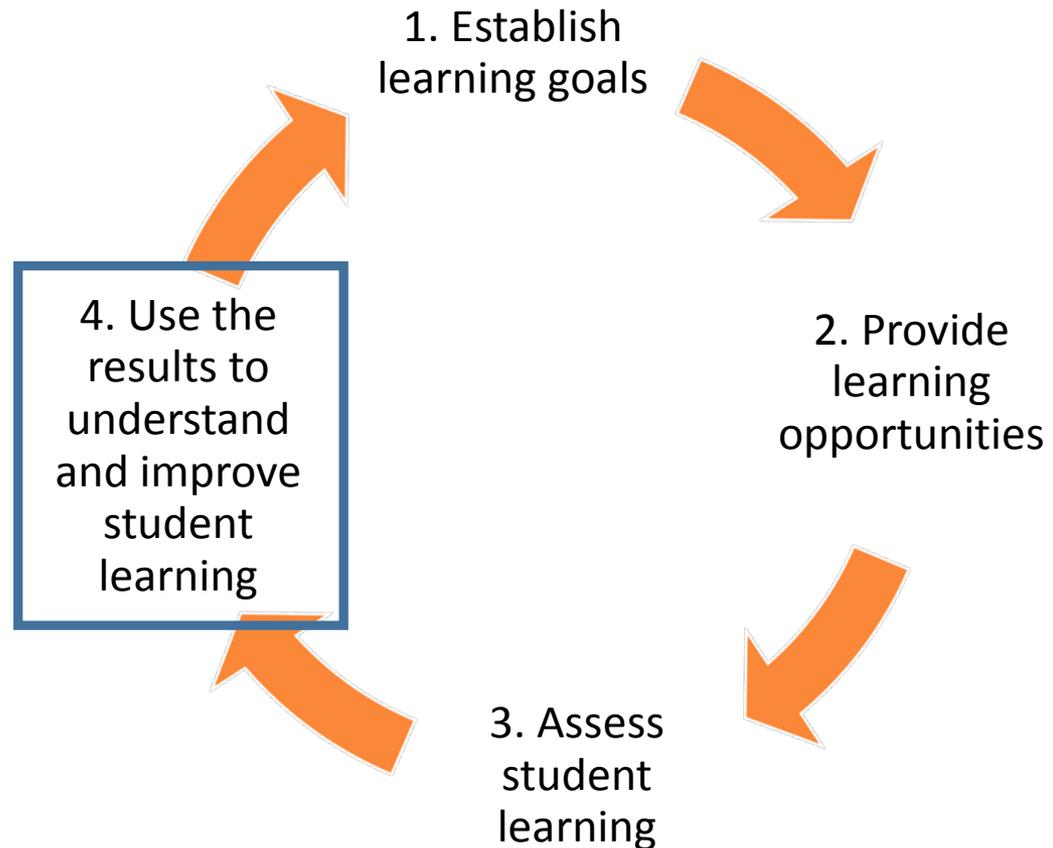
Today's Topics

- Assessment and the Communication Flow
- Breaking down the Assessment Report
- Constructing a Usable Report

Writing an Effective Assessment Report is Important



Linda Suskie, an internationally recognized speaker, writer, educator and consultant on a broad variety of higher education assessment topics, speaks on “Understanding & Improving Student Learning.” The Assessment Forum was held last Friday in Webb Lecture Hall. Lingzi Su/The Bulletin



“All assessment is a perpetual work in progress.”

—Linda Suskie, Vice President, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Planning Communication

What do you want to accomplish with sharing the information?

Who do you want to communicate this to?

What do your audiences need, need to understand?

How will your audience use the information?

How can you best communicate information?

Planning Communication

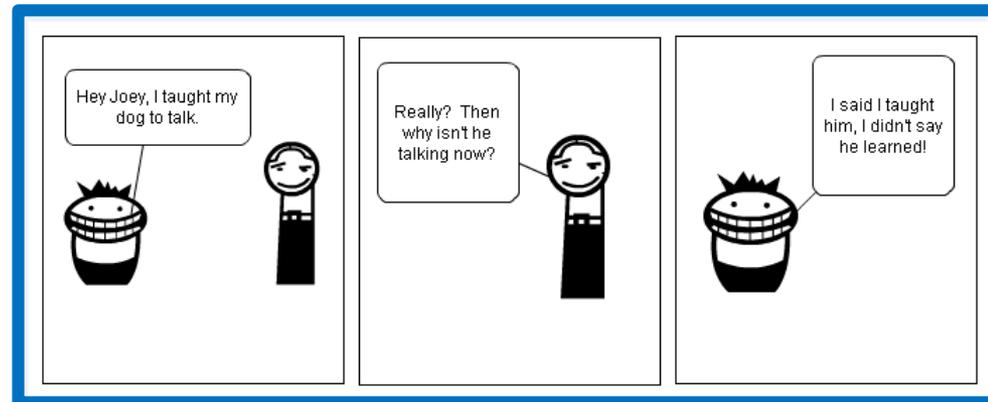
What do you want to accomplish with sharing the information?

- Achieve its intended goals?
 - Unanticipated program benefits?
 - Plans to strengthen/improve?
-
- *My program supports the university learning goals*
 - *To build partnerships with faculty in areas that relate to my program.*
 - *Present my assessment as research with colleagues from another institution.*
 - *Get the Assessment Director off my back!*

Planning Communication

Purposes of Reporting

- Historical reports
- Support for planning and decision-making improvements
- Document your contributions to the learning environment
- Public Relations
- Information Dissemination
- To see how your efforts mattered



Pair off with a partner or the person next to you. Without sharing the details of your project, share the plan of action for an assessment project that you are working or have worked on.



Pair off with a partner or the person next to you. Without sharing the details of your project, share the plan of action for an assessment project that you are working or have worked on.

For the listener: What would you need to know to understand the project, based on what you heard?

For the speaker: Are/were those items covered in your report?



Planning Communication

What do you want to accomplish with sharing the information?

Who do you want to communicate this to?

What do your audiences need, need to understand?

How will your audience use the information?

How can you best communicate information?

How can you help insure that they use it and use it to do what you hope to accomplish?

-Your Assessment Story-

Set the context

What you want to learn and why

How you are going to gather the evidence you need to demonstrate your point

What you discovered and its meaning – what you intend to do with this information

When and how will you see if your actions make a difference



It all begins with the assessment report

Follow the Format – All formats are different

DePaul Report Guide

- Abstract
- Learning Outcome/
Question Assessed
- Introduction and
Context
- Data Collection &
Methodology
- Data and Results

- Discussion &
Interpretation of
Results
- Recommendations &
Plans for Action

Loyola Assessment Report

- Overview
- Learning Outcomes

- Data Collection
- Analysis
- Results

- Reflection
- Future Assistance

Regardless of Format:

- ✓ Write clearly and concisely
- ✓ use active language
- ✓ limit jargon
- ✓ explain acronyms
- ✓ Write in sections with headings.

- ✓ Know your intended audience
but write for a reader unfamiliar
with your work

- ✓ Give reader enough detail to
understand what was **done**,
what you **discovered**, what is
next

- ✓ Get feedback and copy-editing

Academic Assessment Report

A clear summary: motivation, methods, findings, implications.

Sample Abstract (113 words)

The **purpose** of this study was to add to our understanding of the motivations toward service among college students, to get a clearer sense of how students choose their service involvements, and to better understand the learning outcomes from service involvement during college.

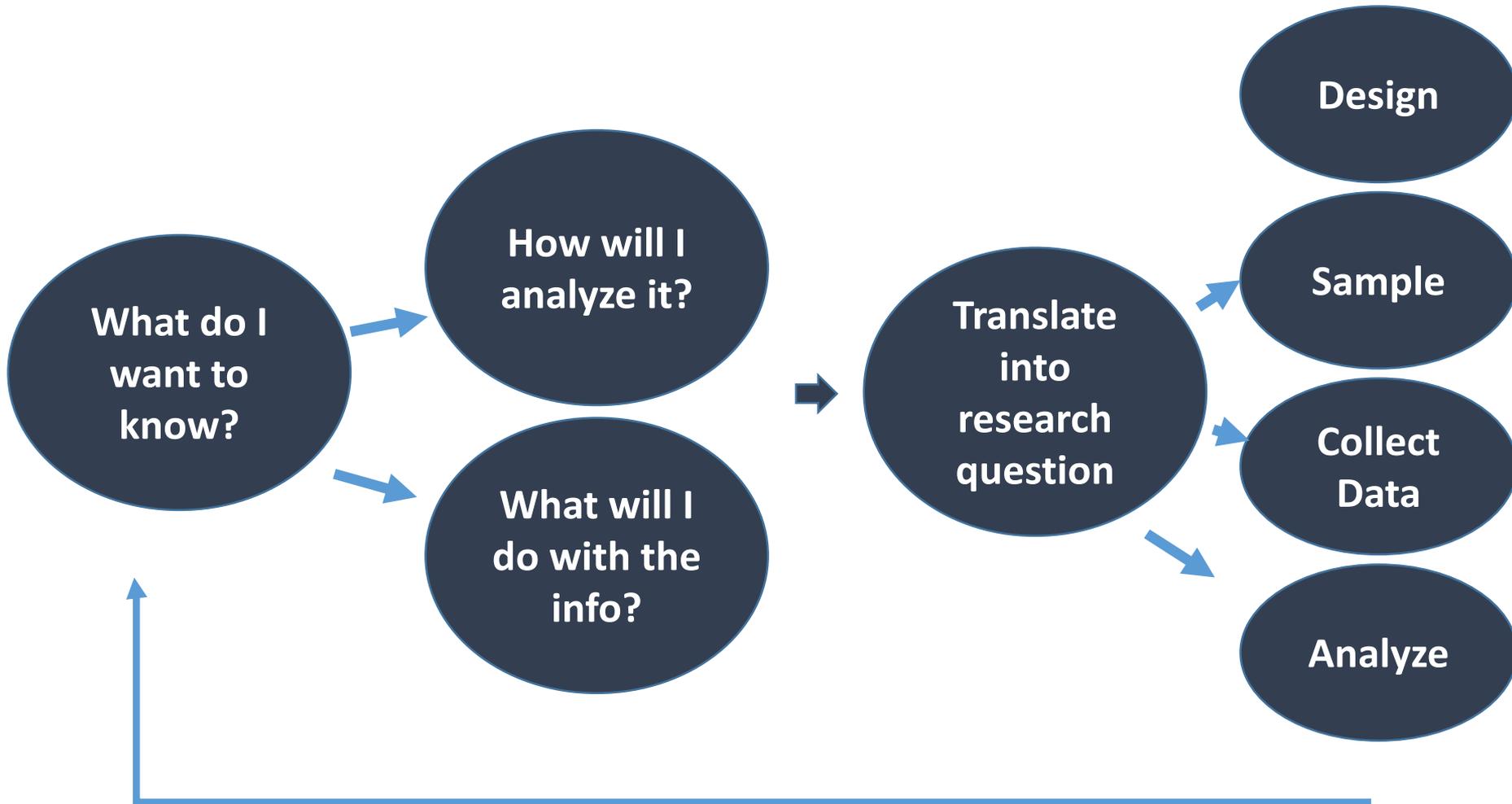
The **methodology** consisted of focus groups, individual interviews and a survey.

Findings indicated differences in how students spoke about their service and learning outcomes based on gender, hours of service, and year in college.

Implications of research findings include recommendations for marketing of service opportunities to students, involving students in service early in their college years, and expanding and centralizing service as a core mission of the college or university.

Chesbrough, R.D. (2011). College Students and Service: A mixed methods exploration of motivations, choices, and learning outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(6), 687-705.

Be Clear About Your Research Question



Go back to the beginning – what did you want to know, what did you find?

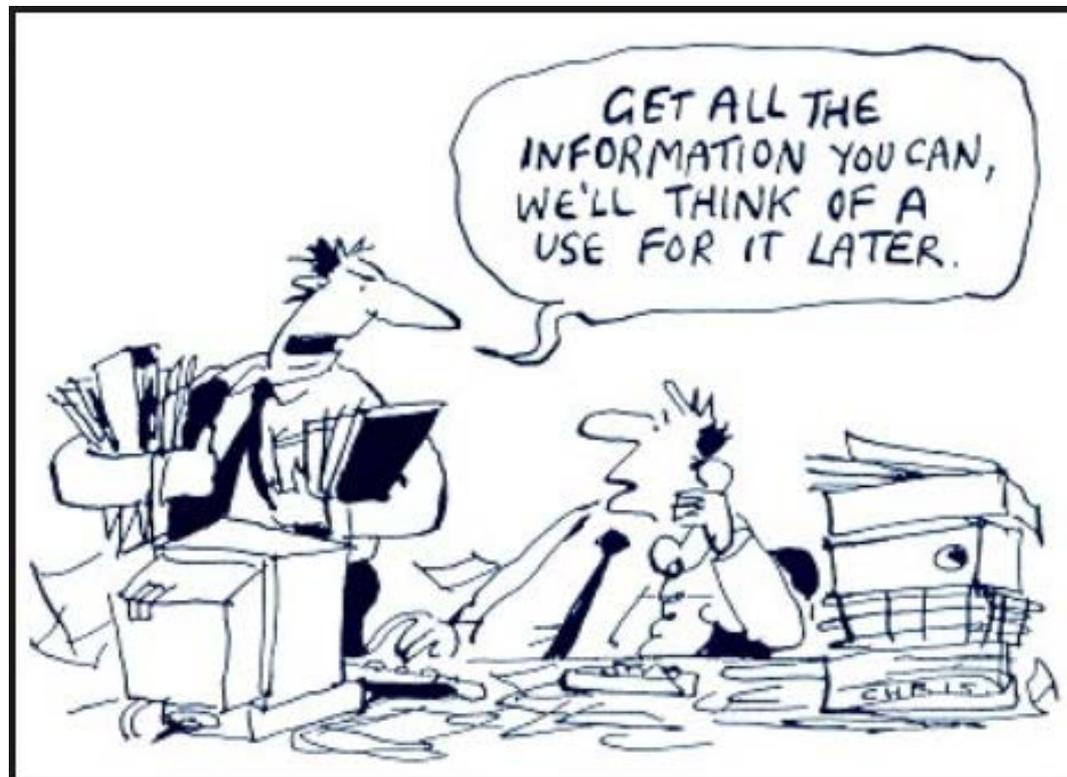
Describe Design and Data Collection

- What information did you collect and how did you collect it?
- Who participated/was invited to participate?
 - the response rate, number of focus group participants, etc.
- What are the important participant characteristics that may be relevant
- How were schools chosen, characteristics of institutions in benchmarking, how were they contacted?



Contract with Participants

- Consent and what to do with forms
- Confidential vs anonymous
- Data Security
- Sensitive Topics
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval



How do you ensure that you use the data you collect to improve your program for the students' benefit?

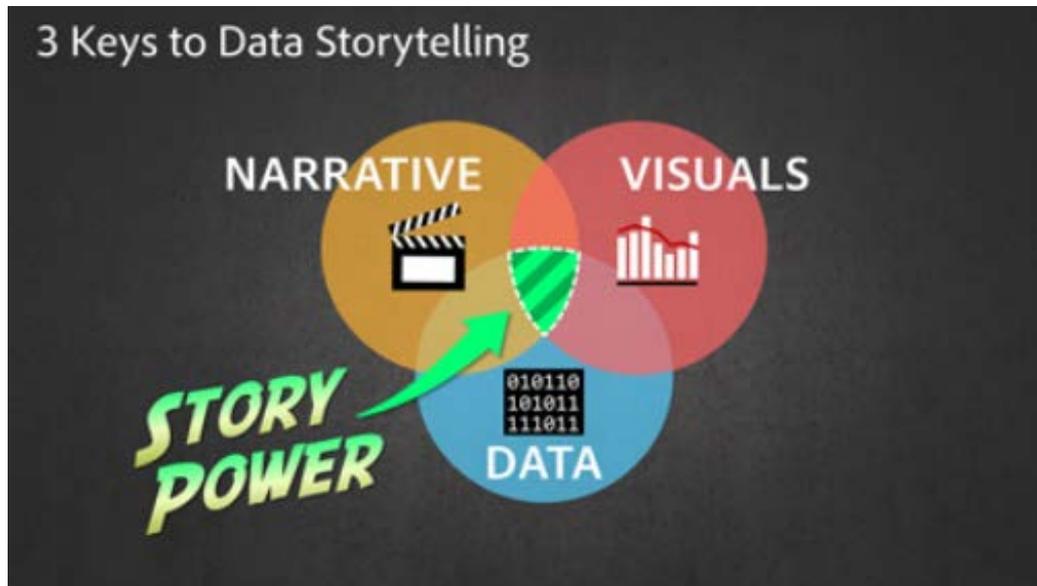
Explain How You Analyzed Your Data

- How you aggregated your data into meaningful results
 - statistics to summarize or compare groups?
 - rubric to categorize responses? qualitative data?
- Basic summary statistics effective: mean, frequency, percentages
- What is your criteria for success? (Define this before you collect data)

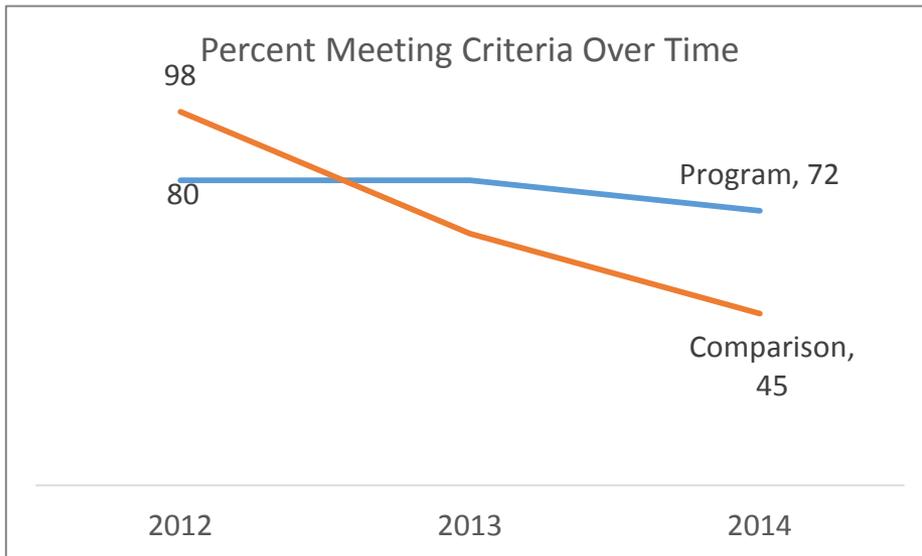
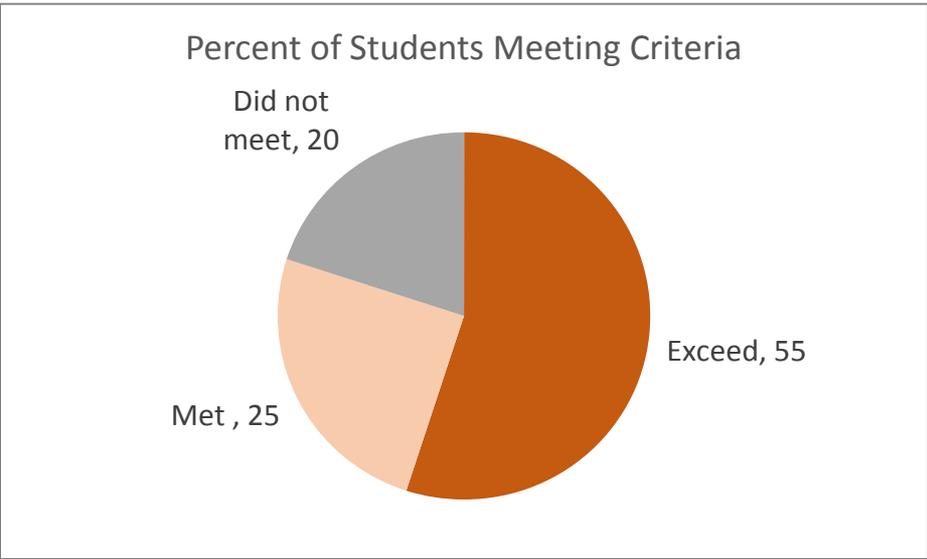
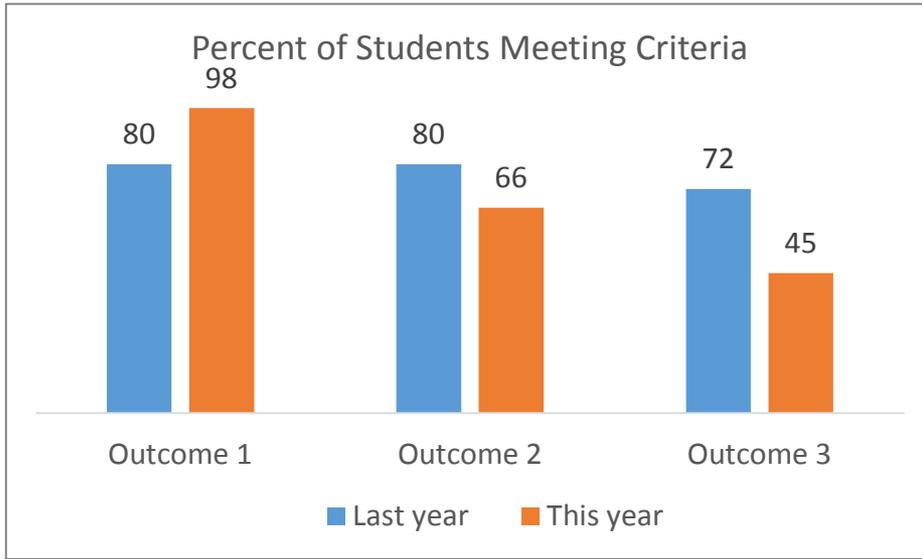


Describe What You Found – The Results

- Remember your audience
- Keep it simple and clear
- Accurately describe findings – use a meaningful flow
- Acknowledge if something did not work
- Summarize findings in tables, graphs, quotes



Showing the Data Can Be More Engaging than Describing

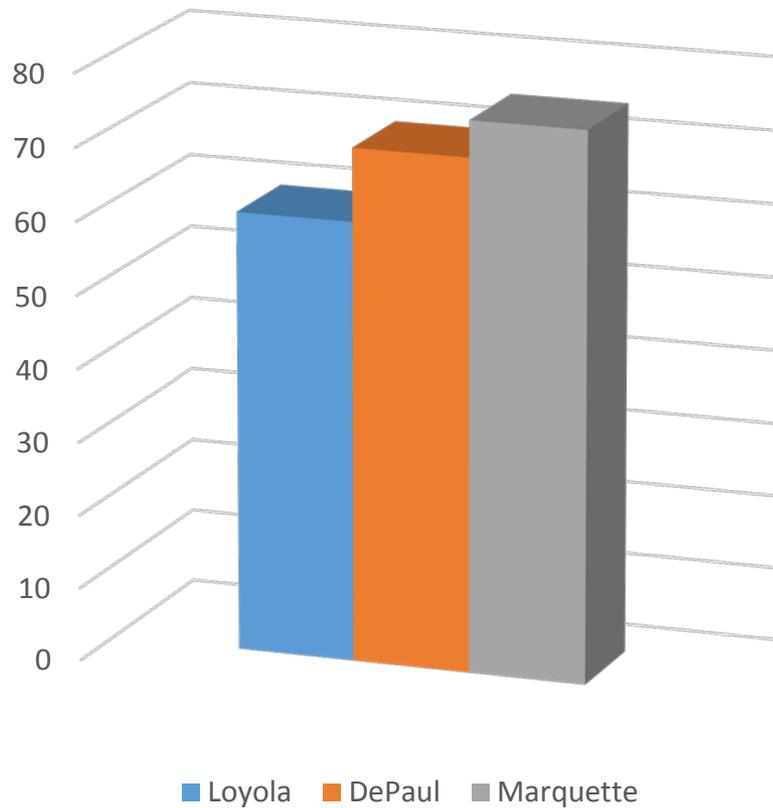


	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Measure 1	80%	80%	72%

Use tables when you want to be exact or when you don't have a lot of data

Avoid Using Default Settings and NO 3D!

Learning Outcomes from Reporting Session



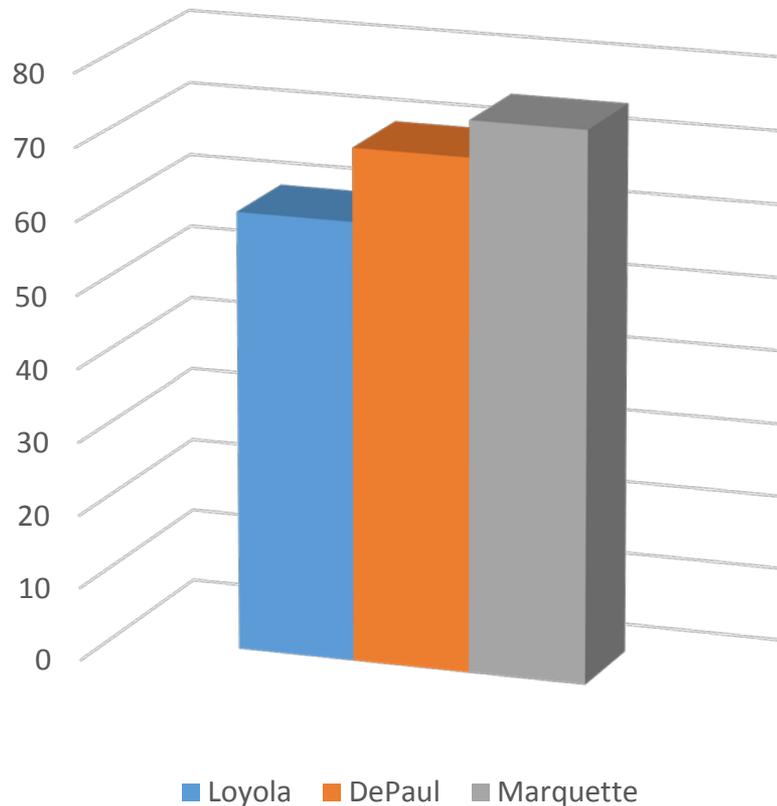
NO 3D!



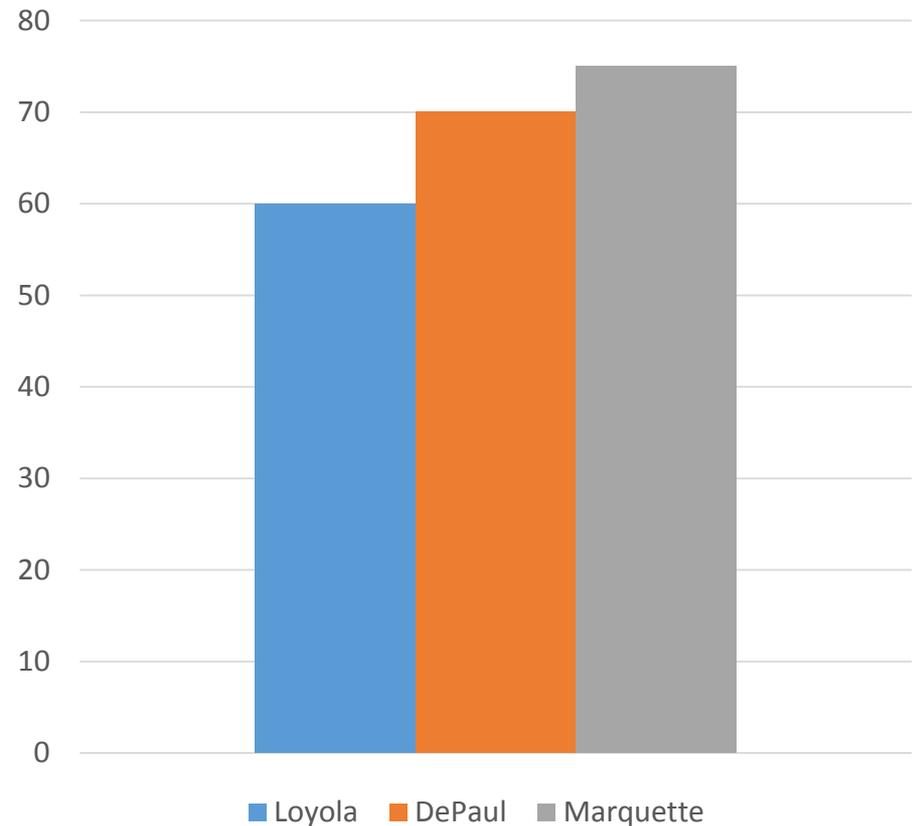
Avoid Using Default Settings and NO 3D!

YES!

Learning Outcomes from Reporting Session



Learning Outcomes from Reporting Session

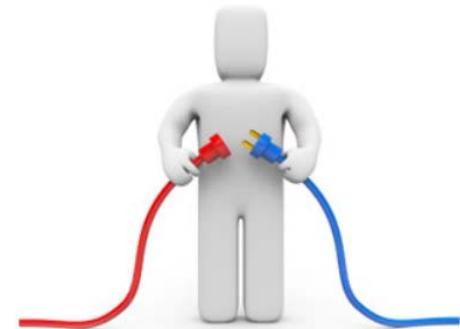


Explain What Your Findings Mean – Reflection/Discussion

- Go back to the beginning to your research questions
 - Finding 1
 - Finding 2
 - Etc..
- What did you learn? What surprised you?
- Study's limitations? Every study has limitations
- How will you use your results to improve your program?
 - **Specific** Recommendations?
 - **Detailed** improvement plan and timeline?
 - Define barriers/resources needed?
- Follow-up studies?

Make it easy for your reader to remember and use

- Prepare a well-written report
 - Write clearly
 - No jargon, explain acronyms
 - Peer review and copy-edit
 - Keep it short and to the point
- Write a concise abstract or executive summary
 - can you summarize it “in a nutshell”
 - Consider an infographic to summarize
- Put your project and findings in context
- Be an advocate for your findings



Back to the Communication Plan

Share results with different constituents

What works/what needs improvement
Full report and detail

Conclusions and how you came to these conclusions
Abstract as executive summary, report

Student-focused findings and benefits
Reshaped abstract, quotes to bring to life



The Residents, Commuters, and Dining Committee

DePaul Transition Leaders
The Division of Student Affairs

With your partner or the person next to you, review your templates and discuss the pieces that will be easy to address and those that will be more challenging for you.

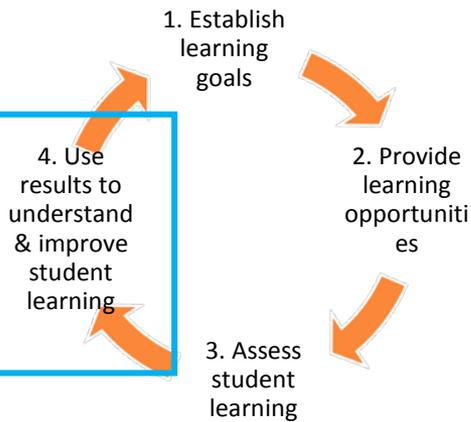
How do you plan to address the ones that will be more challenging? What resources might you utilize?

Tips from Readers

- Choose a learning outcome that is included in the catalogue
- Fill out the learning goals table in the template, and use whole numbers
- Make sure you clearly state your question or learning outcome
- Make sure you discuss at the end the questions you stated at the beginning
- Discuss at the end the questions you stated at the beginning
- Include a specific timeline for your plan of action
- Take time to explain why you chose the methodology you used to answer your question



Quick Reference Guide – Planning and Writing Assessment Report



Build a communication plan:

- What** do you want to accomplish with sharing the information?
- Who** do you want to communicate this to?
- What** do your audiences need, need to understand?
- How** will your audience use the information?
- How** can you best communicate information?

Be an Advocate for your Findings

Connect the information to users

- Build interest in project – talk about it
- Share draft findings – get constituents involved
- Develop multi-faceted communication plan
 - Multiple audiences: Program leaders, division, assessment group
 - Multiple methods: Report, summary, website post, campus paper, group discussion, infographic
 - Multiple points in time: During project, when report is final, during follow-up

Make it easy for readers to use

- Prepare a well-written report
 - Write clearly for a reader who is unfamiliar with what you do
 - No jargon, explain acronyms
 - Peer review and copy-edit
 - Keep it short and to the point (Loyola reports 2-5 pages; DePaul reports 5-10)
- Distribute report with concise abstract
- Consider an infographic for 1-page summary
- Put your project and findings in context
 - Explain how learning outcome link to department, division, university learning goals
 - Explain project implications (Assessment workshop, May 2016, Sanders)

Typical Report Sections

Overview/Abstract
Learning Outcomes

Questions to Consider:

- Purpose, methodology, findings, implications
- List outcome
- What is assessment outcome (research question)

Data Collection

- How was data collected, study design, participants
- Consider your 'contract' with participants

Analysis

- How did you aggregate your findings into results
- Statistics or methods used
- Criteria for success

Results

- Who participated
- What does data tell you, does it answer question
- Show data in graphs, tables, quotes, summaries

Reflection/ Future Assistance

- What are key findings
- How will you use results to improve program

Assessing Student Learning: Nine Principles of Good Practice

The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

- **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience. Department/division
- **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful. University
- **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
- **Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be

evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.

- **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
- **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
- **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
- **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

A. Astin, T. W. Banta, K. P. Cross, E. El-Khawas, P. T. Ewell, P. Hutchings, T. J. Marchese, K.M. McClenney, M. Mentkowski, M. A. Miller, E. T. Moran & B. D. Wright, 1992, <http://www.brown.edu/about/administration/sheridan28center/teaching-learning/assessing-student-learning/nine-principles>