

# GLOSSARY OF ASSESSMENT TERMS

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**Accountability:** The demand by a community (public officials, employers, and taxpayers) for school officials to prove that money invested in education has led to measurable learning.

**Accreditation:** A certification awarded by an external, recognized organization, that the institution or program meets certain requirements overall, or in a particular discipline.

**Assessment:** Is any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

**Benchmark:** A criterion-referenced objective; "Performance data that are used for comparative purposes. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance. It can also use data from another program as a benchmark. In the latter case, the other program often is chosen because it is exemplary and its data are used as a target to strive for, rather than as a baseline." (p. xv) Hatry, H., van Houten, T., Plantz, M., & Greenway, M.T. (1996).

**Bias:** A situation that occurs in testing when items systematically measure differently for different ethnic, gender, or age groups. Test developers reduce bias by analyzing item data separately for each group, then identifying and discarding items that appear to be biased.

**Case Study:** Detailed inquiry into a person, place, organization, time of life, process, specific incident, or program.

**Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS):** A consortium of professional associations founded in 1979 and concerned with the development and promulgation of professional standards and guidelines for student support programs and services in institutions of higher learning ([www.cas.edu](http://www.cas.edu)).

**Document Analysis:** The gathering of documents such as minutes from organizational or staff meetings, reports, photographs, old letters, student files, or organizational files (Patton, 2002).

**Effectiveness** (results of operations) is how well an approach, a process, or a measure addresses its intended purpose.

**Evaluation:** Any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional or agency effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)

**Focus Group:** Small number of people (typically between 4 and 8) brought together with a moderator and asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a topic, concept, etc.

**Human Subjects Office:** The Human Subjects Office provides administrative and secretarial support for the IRB, and assists researchers through the application and approval process. The Administrator acts on behalf of the IRB and the University when providing assurance of human subjects approval to sponsoring agencies, or when dealing with regulatory agencies. The Human Subjects Office staff is responsible for regularly monitoring IRB compliance, and updating IRB procedures with current and/or new relevant federal or state regulations.

**Institutional Review Board:** The IRB is charged with the responsibility of protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research (See Human Subjects Office).

**Learning Outcomes:** Changes or consequences that occur as a result of enrollment in a particular educational institution and involvement in its courses and programs. What a student is able to know, demonstrate, analyze, and synthesize following course and program instruction.

**Needs Assessment:** The process of determining the presence or absence of factors and conditions, resources, services, and learning opportunities that students need in order to meet their educational goals and objectives within the context of an institution's mission (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

**Observation:** Often referred to as participant observation, it is used to understand the setting, the participants, and their behavior. It is a procedure for generating understanding of the ways of life of others (Schwandt, 2001).

**Program Assessment (Program Review):** The program outcomes are based on how each part is interacting with the rest of the parts, not on how each part is doing individually. The knowledge, skills, and abilities that students achieve at the end of their programs are affected by how well courses and other experiences in the curriculum fit together and build on each other throughout the undergraduate years.

**Program Objectives:** Reflects student learning outcomes and achievements related to the academic program as a unit rather than an individual course.

**Qualitative Research/Assessment:** The detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; use of direct quotations from people about the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and analysis of excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories (Patton, 1990).

**Quantitative Research/Assessment:** Mode of inquiry that attempts to systematically measure and predict phenomena through the use of standardized tools. It is inherently a world of numbers, percentages, and therefore tangible analysis.

**Reliability:** Reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials.

**Research:** A systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process (Merriam, 2009).

**Rubrics:** A rubric is a set of categories that define and describe the important components of the work being completed, critiqued, or assessed. Each category contains a gradation of levels of completion or competence with a score assigned to each level and a clear description of what criteria need to be met to attain the score at each level.

**Triangulation:** The use of a combination of assessment methods in a study. An example of triangulation would be an assessment that incorporated surveys, interviews, and observations.

**Validity:** Refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. Validity has three components: relevance (direct measurement), accuracy (how precise are the measurements), and utility (how clear are the implications for improvement).

\* *Adapted from:*

<http://studentaffairs.uga.edu/assess/ugares/index.htm#top>

<http://www.ozarka.edu/assessment/glossary.cfm>

\* *Resources:*

Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Upcraft, M.L. & Schuh, J.H. (1996). *Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

