Summary of *Direct* Assessment Techniques

DIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES (Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004)		
Technique	**Potential Strength**	**Potential Limitations**
Published tests	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • Generally, are carefully developed, highly reliable, professionally scored, and nationally normed • Frequently provide a number of norm groups, such as norms for community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive universities • Online versions of tests are increasingly available, and some provide immediate scoring • Some publishers allow faculty to supplement tests with their own items, so tests can be adapted to better serve local needs	• If the test does not reflect the learning objectives that faculty value and the curricula that students experience, results are likely to be discounted and inconsequential • Most published tests rely heavily on multiple-choice items that often focus on specific facts, but program learning objectives more often emphasize higher-level skills • Test scores may reflect criteria that are too broad for meaningful assessment • Students may not take the test seriously if test results have no impact on their lives • Tests can be expensive • The marginal gain from annual testing may be low • Faculty may object to standardized exam scores on general principles, leading them to ignore results
Locally developed tests	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • Appropriate mixes of items allow faculty to address various types of learning objectives • Can provide for authentic assessment of higher-level learning • Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning • If well constructed, they are likely to have good validity • Because local faculty write the exam, they are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them • Can be integrated into routine faculty workloads • Campuses with similar missions could decide to develop their own norms, and they could assess student work together or provide independent assessment of each other's student work • Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it	• These exams are likely to be less reliable than published exams • Reliability and validity generally are unknown • Creating effective exams requires time and skill • Score exams takes time • Traditional testing methods may not provide authentic measurement • Norms generally are not available
Embedded assignments and course activities	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • Out-of-class assignments are not restricted to time constraints typical for exams • Students are generally motivated to demonstrate the extent of their learning • Can provide authentic assessment of learning objectives • Can involve ratings by fieldwork supervisors • Can provide a context for assessing communication and teamwork skills, as well as other types of learning objectives • Can be used for grading as well as assessment • Faculty who develop the procedures are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them • Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it • Data collection is unobtrusive to students	• Requires time to develop and coordinate • Requires faculty trust that the program will be assessed, not individual teachers • Reliability and validity generally are unknown • Norms generally are not available

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Competence interviews	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • The interview format allows faculty to probe for the breadth and extent of student learning • Can be combined with other techniques that more effectively assess knowledge of facts and terms • Can involve authentic assessment, such as simulated interactions with clients • Can provide for direct assessment of some student skills, such as oral communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills	• Requires time to develop, coordinate, schedule, and implement • Interview protocols must be carefully developed • Subjective judgments must be guided by agreed-upon criteria • Interviewer training takes time • Interviewing using unstructured interviews requires expertise • Not an efficient way to assess knowledge of specific facts and terms • Some students may be intimidated by the process, reducing their ability to demonstrate their learning
Portfolios	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • Students are encouraged to take responsibility for and pride in their learning • Students may become more aware of their own academic growth • Can be used for developmental assessment and can be integrated into the advising process to individualize student planning • Can help faculty identify curriculum gaps • Students can use portfolios and the portfolio process to prepare for graduate school or career applications • Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it • Webfolios or CD-ROMs can be easily viewed, duplicated, and stored	• Requires faculty time to prepare the portfolio assignment and to assist students in preparing portfolios • Requires faculty analysis and, if graded, faculty time to assign grades • May be difficult to motivate students to take the task seriously • May be more difficult for transfer students to assemble the portfolio if they haven't saved relevant materials • Students may refrain from criticizing the program if their portfolio is graded or if their names will be associate with portfolios during the review • It may be difficult to protect student confidentiality and privacy
Collective portfolios	• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives • Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning • Workload demands generally are more manageable than traditional portfolios • Students are not required to do extra work • Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it • Data collection is unobtrusive to students	• If assignments are not aligned with the objectives being examined, evidence may be problematic • If sampling is not done well, results may not generalize to the entire program • Reviewing the materials takes time and planning