

Common Concerns about Outcomes Assessment

Does this process affect my academic freedom?

Nothing inherent in the Antelope Valley College outcomes assessment process interferes or violates the academic freedom of the instructor. Assessing outcomes is simply about faculty determining whether students are learning those things they deem most important, and then using the information to make changes where appropriate. Nothing in the Antelope Valley College process dictates in any way how faculty choose to deliver the course content or how they grade their students. Requiring faculty every few semesters to use a common instrument to assess three core course outcomes is far less proscriptive than asking faculty to use a common text, a common requirement in higher education that is generally accepted by faculty as reasonable.

Will this be more work for us?

To some degree yes, but we are committed to not allowing the outcomes assessment process to become burdensome in a way that will interfere with a faculty member's commitment to teaching. The vast majority of time faculty will commit to this process will be confined to intra and inter-disciplinary discussions of what are the most important student outcomes, how these can best be assessed, and what improvements, if any, are suggested by the assessment results.

Will assessment information be used to evaluate faculty?

Absolutely not. This process is about assessing the effectiveness of programs, courses, and services not individuals. In fact, mechanisms and guarantees have been put in place to ensure that the results will *never* be reported in a way that will permit them to be associated with any individual, faculty or student.

Isn't the primary purpose of outcomes assessment to find fault with things?

No, this is not about finding fault with programs, courses, or individuals; it is about agreeing on what is most important in our courses, communicating that to all stakeholders, and finding out what's working and what's not. Great assessment results can and should be used to trumpet success, market programs, motivate faculty and students, and justify increased resources. Less than satisfactory assessment results should lead to improvements in programs, courses, and services.

Will the results have complete statistical validity and will they be useful?

The short answers are no and yes. While the results will not have the kind of statistical validity or reliability that would make a statistics professor happy, they will most certainly be useful in the way this process intends – to give faculty members meaningful information about how their courses are doing at achieving the goals they themselves defined. Achieving greater validity and reliability would require that a carefully selected

random sample of papers be scored by a team of trained evaluators, thus minimizing the direct participation in the process by the vast majority of faculty. The AVC assessment process makes a trade-off between complete statistical reliability and faculty involvement.

Isn't this just a slippery slope leading to standardized testing?

Absolutely, and unequivocally, not!! Such a direction has never even been contemplated by anyone, including administrators, involved with outcomes assessment at Antelope Valley College. For further reassurance, know that **the WASC**, strong advocates of outcomes assessment, **do not advocate standardized testing**.

Is this just another academic fad that will be gone in a couple of years?

Not likely. The outcomes assessment movement has been a serious one for at least a decade, and its momentum is growing not waning. Every higher education accreditation agency across the country now includes the assessment of learning outcomes as one of their highest priority criterion. The WASC, being one of the last to do so, has just revamped its accreditation standards so that they reflect and emphasize the importance of creating a culture of outcomes assessment within the institutions it oversees.