

## **Making Assessment Part of Your Routine**

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The need for assessment is obvious; it allows us to demonstrate how the fraternity/sorority experience adds value, and results in both accountability and improvement in our roles as fraternity/sorority professionals (Banta, 1993). All too often, however, assessment is an afterthought because it is viewed as something that occurs at the end of an experience instead of being incorporated into everything we do. Unfortunately, it may not be part of our “routine” as fraternity/sorority professionals.

If we reflect on human nature and our daily lives, we begin to understand how we are creatures of habit that tend to follow a routine to get us from semester to semester. If our personal routines became natural and consistent, then how can we use the same mindset as fraternity/sorority professionals to create habitual practices for assessment of our programs/initiatives?

Effective assessment practice is an area that Fraternity & Sorority Life staff members at Bowling Green State University are continuing to enhance. In no way are we claiming to be “experts;” rather, we would like to outline what we have learned and provide some helpful tips that worked for us to cultivate a culture where assessment is engrained in our “routine.”

The first step in adding any new component or practice to your regular routine is making time for it, which implies that you fully understand how much time it will take. As achievements from this academic year are reflected upon, and before the beginning of the next academic year, take a look at the programs, initiatives, and experiences for which you are responsible. Make a commitment to adding assessment at the very beginning of your planning timelines. More importantly, make assessment part of your comprehensive program evaluation plan. Once assessment is viewed as a process, the following three approaches can serve as your foundation.

### 1. Develop effective learning outcomes.

Even though the development of learning outcomes has become an expectation within the realm of student affairs, most professionals still do not really understand how to create and use them effectively. The “learning” in learning outcomes implies that learning, not satisfaction, is being measured as a result of a certain experience. Thus, in order to assess whether the outcome has been met or not, all learning outcomes must be written effectively by including three components: the behavior you would like changed or altered, the condition which will provide the change in behavior, and the degree to which the behavior will be changed (Anderson & Kratwohl, 2001). When determining educational goals and creating learning outcomes, an effective resource to use is Bloom’s Taxonomy of action verbs to help you identify if you are assessing knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation (Learning Skills Program, n.d.).

It is not until the learning outcomes have been defined that you should begin putting together those clever ideas or activities for your program or retreat. This requires self-restraint, and the ability to recognize when an activity or topic should not be a part of that experience because it does not align with the learning outcomes.

2. Get past your comfort zone of typical assessment.

There are countless ways to assess your programs and initiatives outside of typical assessment. Challenge yourself to think creatively about the different opportunities available to you in order to accurately tell your story. Whether you choose a program evaluation, a focus group, a rubric, or at specific times the use of all three, focus on direct learning verses indirect learning. Direct methods require participants to display their knowledge, behavior, or thought process while indirect methods ask students to reflect upon their knowledge, behaviors, or thought process (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004). For example, asking participants to rate their overall level of agreement with statements such as, "I understand the role of values in the fraternal experience," *does not* tell you that learning was achieved because it is indirect and self-reported based on the students' perception. Instead, you could ask participants to describe the role of values in the fraternal experience using their own words, and use a rubric to determine a poor, fair, and proficient response. Now that would tell you if learning was achieved or not!

3. Actually do something with your findings.

If you make the commitment to add to your routine the first two steps mentioned above, you owe it to yourself to make time for the third. It may seem like a no-brainer, but let us face it! As our to-do lists become longer and longer, analyzing data from assessments/evaluations inevitably falls by the wayside. So, do not cross that program or retreat off your list until you have completely wrapped up the assessment and evaluation. At BGSU, we are fortunate enough to have partnered with CampusLabs, an online interface that assists with assessment and evaluation projects. If you do not have access to CampusLabs or an equivalent, enter findings/results into Excel, and critically analyze the outcomes. Questions you could ask are:

- In what ways can I see that learning was achieved/not achieved for each outcome?
- What are the limitations of how I chose to assess learning, and how can it be improved for next year?
- What changes need to be made to this program/retreat/initiative next year based on these findings?

Once these questions have been carefully considered and answered, use them to inform your approach for the coming year. Then, repeat steps one through three.

Just like adding anything new or different to your daily routine, it will take a while for assessment to feel like "second nature." Although we have plenty of room to improve, we have challenged ourselves to make assessment a part of our "routine" within Fraternity & Sorority Life at BGSU and here is a snapshot of our approach.



We have identified four “signature programs” that require strong assessment as part of our comprehensive evaluation. These include Greek New Member Orientation, a partnership with the NIC on the implementation of Futures Quest®, our annual chapter presidents’ retreat, and the *Greek Community Standards of Excellence* program. Each program has a different target audience, unique learning outcomes, and collectively serves as a mechanism to create a fraternal experience that aligns with our mission and values. To better understand the approaches utilized in our comprehensive evaluation, in the table below we summarized key components in each of these programs that include: the target audience of the program, the specific type of assessment utilized on the target audience, the time of year when the assessment was administered, and the type of direct learning focused upon during the program that we were attempting to assess. It is important to note student growth and development were considered in the outcomes created, the type of learning experience provided, and the specific assessment approaches utilized.

<b>Name of Program</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Type of Assessment Utilized</b>	<b>Time of Year When Assessment is Administered</b>	<b>Type of learning Focused Upon</b>
Greek New Member Orientation	New Members/Neophytes, primarily first year students	Pre- and post-test based on learning outcomes	Ongoing sessions offered throughout the year; pre-test administered online a week prior to session, post-test administered immediately after	Basic understanding of personal values, knowledge of risks associated with f/s membership (i.e. hazing, alcohol, bystander effect), knowledge of resources
Futures Quest®	Emerging leaders, primarily sophomores	Pre- and post-test; focus group; NIC also administers a participant survey	Pre-test: during travel to retreat site; Post-test: during travel back to campus; Focus Group: 6 months after participation in retreat	Defining vision and action plan for one's f/s experience, understanding of one's leadership practices, identification of one's values
Chapter Presidents' Retreat	Chapter presidents, primarily juniors with some sophomores	Pre- and post-test; learning rubric assessing abilities of attendees	Post-test administered after each day of retreat; Rubric used in a specific activity related to Univ. learning outcomes	Leadership skill development, understanding components of The Social Change Model; and action plan for their term
<i>Greek Community Standards of Excellence</i>	Chapter members, all years	Survey of participants; team evaluations of chapter operations; focus group of interview participants; focus group of team evaluators; rubric	Team evaluations will be used to compare chapter operational performance on a longitudinal scale; rubric used in the interview to identify ability of members connected to Univ. learning outcomes	Reflection on one's experience and growth; understanding of how one's fraternity/sorority impacts the campus/local community; identification of how one's values and actions are congruent

In conclusion, assessment needs to be part of a comprehensive program evaluation plan. When staff design experiences that allow for direct learning, provide a variety of ways to obtain data from students, and prioritize the analysis of outcomes and learning following the completion of programs, assessment can become routine. This type of routine can then solidify the type of fraternal program that aligns with your program's mission and values, and complements the efforts of one's Division and University.

#### References

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