**Assessment Jargon Buster**

**Actionable evidence** - Evidence about student learning that key stakeholders can understand and use to improve student and institutional performance.

**Add-on assignment** - Assignment students complete in addition to course requirements (e.g., standardized test, survey). A major challenge with most add-on assessments is convincing students not only to participate in them but also to give the assessment tasks serious thought and effort.

**Alignment** - A logical connection between the curriculum (learning experiences and assignments), the expected outcomes, and the criteria used to evaluate student achievement of those outcomes.

**Anchor** - Sample of student work that exemplifies a specific level of performance. Raters use anchors to score student work, usually comparing the student performance to the anchor.

**Artifact** - An object produced to indicate mastery of a skill or component of knowledge.

**Assessment of student learning** - The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning.

**Authentic assignment** - Assignment which asks students to perform a real-life task in the way professionals in the field would perform it. (e.g., asking students to create a marketing campaign and evaluating that campaign instead of asking students to answer test questions about characteristics of a good marketing campaign). Authentic assignments engage students in challenges that closely represent what they are likely to face as everyday workers and citizens.

**Bloom’s taxonomy** - A framework consisting of six major categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The categories after Knowledge represent “skills and abilities,” with the understanding that knowledge is the necessary precondition for putting these skills and abilities into practice.

**Closing the loop** - This is an iterative ongoing four-step process: 1. defining learning outcomes, 2. choosing a method or approach and using it to gather evidence of learning, 3. analyzing and interpreting the evidence, 4. using this information of improve student learning. The cycle must be completed and repeated to see whether the changes have produced the desired result.

**Course-embedded assignment** - Course assignment used for both grading and assessment to determine if students are meeting the desired learning outcomes. Embedded assessment is a means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching-learning process.

**Curriculum map** - An auditing tool that helps identify potential disconnects between course activities and the learning objectives established for the course or the program.

- **Course curriculum map** - Matrix that connects learning outcomes for a particular course to the activities within the course that allow for the achievement of the outcomes.
- **Program curriculum map** - A matrix representation of a program’s learning outcomes that shows where they are taught within the program.

**Direct method** - Method that yields tangible and visible evidence of student learning; prompts students to represent or demonstrate their learning or produce work that observers can assess to evaluate the extent to which students have achieved the desired learning outcomes.

**Formative assessment** - Assessment undertaken while student learning is taking place; designed to capture students' progress toward learning outcomes.

**Indirect method** - Asks students to reflect on their learning rather than demonstrate it; captures students' perceptions of their learning. No assessment of knowledge, conceptual understanding, or thinking or performance skills should consist of indirect evidence alone.
Item analysis - Each item on a test is analyzed to determine the proportions of students selecting each answer. This process is used to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses and may indicate problems with the test's validity and possible bias.

Norming - Process of training raters to use rubrics to evaluate student products and performances consistently. Raters need to participate in norming sessions before scoring student performance. Each rater applies the rubric to evaluate a product or behavior; then raters compare judgments and discuss the basis of the judgments.

Objective assignment - One that needs no professional judgment to score correctly (e.g., multiple-choice, true-false exams).

Performance-based assignment - Assignment that asks students to demonstrate their skills rather than relate what they have learned (e.g., field experiences, laboratory and studio assignments, essays).

Performance target - A standard of achievement against which to evaluate or judge performance (e.g., 70% of students should score 3 or higher on each criterion of the lab skills rubric).

Portfolio - A type of performance assessment in which students' work is systematically collected and carefully reviewed for evidence of learning. In addition to examples of their work, most portfolios include reflective statements prepared by students.

Rubric - A tool often shaped like a matrix, with criteria on one side and levels of achievement across the top used to score products or performances. Rubrics describe the characteristics of different levels of performance such as beginning, intermediate, or advanced. Rubrics are meaningful and useful when shared with students before their work is judged so they better understand the expectations for their performance. When used by multiple raters, norming should take place before scoring begins.

Sampling - Method to obtain information about characteristics of a population by examining a smaller, randomly chosen selection (the sample) of the group members. If conducted correctly, sampling results will be representative of the population as a whole.

Scaffolding - Breaking down multipart processes into smaller steps or providing students with examples, prompts, or directions to help them succeed at complex assignments. A scaffold for learning provides students with support until they can complete a task on their own.

Signature assignment - Assignment or exam that best displays the knowledge or skills essential to the objectives of a course/program. Think of a signature assignment as a milestone in the student’s progress toward fulfilling the program objectives. Ideally, signature assignments are the types of works that students and professors would most like to present to others as evidence of accomplishment.

Student learning outcomes (SLO) - Short statements describing what students should be able to do as a result of a given educational experience.

Summative assessment - Assessment conducted at the end of a course or program; designed to capture students’ achievement at the end of a given learning experience.

Transparent assignment - Assignment that clearly articulates the purpose and evaluation criteria of a given task. Research has shown that when students understand the task, its purpose, and the criteria for evaluating their work, they are more motivated and feel the work is more relevant.

Triangulation - The use of a combination of methods in a study. The collection of data from multiple sources to support a central finding or theme or to overcome the weaknesses associated with a single method.