**Choosing the Right Assessment Method:**

**Rubrics**

**Definition:** Rubrics are the most flexible type of direct assessment and can be used to score any program level product or performance measure such as essays, portfolios, capstone projects, skill performances, etc. When using a rubric for assessment purposes, faculty must agree on a detailed scoring system that delineates criteria used to discriminate among levels.

For program level assessment, it is recommended that faculty use standardized rubrics across all courses and sections utilized in the assessment of the program SLOs. This practice affords all faculty with clear guidelines about departmental standards/expectations, what content to emphasize, and the level of difficulty expected for each topic.

**Advantages:**

- Defines clear faculty expectations of students.
- Allows students to better understand the scores they earn.
- Can be used to score many kinds of assignments or exams.
- Faculty define standards and criteria and how they will be applied.
- Complex products or behaviors can be examined efficiently.

**Disadvantages:**

- Not useful for multiple choice or short answer tests.
- Faculty must agree on how to define standards and criteria.
- Faculty must agree on how they will apply the criteria when grading.

**Developing a Scoring Rubric**

- Identify what you are assessing (e.g., critical thinking, professional skills, etc.)
- Identify how to assess the learning (see the other PDFs located under the direct assessment area of this page for ideas).
- Identify the characteristics of what you are assessing (e.g., appropriate use of evidence, recognition of logical fallacies, etc.)
- Describe the best work you could expect using these characteristics. This describes the top category.
- Describe the worst acceptable or unacceptable work using these characteristics. This describes the lowest acceptable category.
- Develop descriptions of intermediate-level work and assign them to intermediate categories. You might decide to develop a scale that runs from one to five (e.g.,
unacceptable, marginal, competent, very competent, outstanding), one to three (e.g., novice, competent, mastery), or any other set that is meaningful.

- To assess student learning outcomes, the use of a 4- or 5-point/level rubric is recommended. In this way, data collection and analysis of student learning can be aggregated easily. Nevertheless, a scoring rubric will require the faculty of a course to design an agreed upon assignment or comparable options and confirm the evaluation criteria for each point or level of the rubric.

- Sometimes during the scoring process, instructors realize that they hold implicit criteria that are not stated in the scoring rubric. Identifying implicit criteria can help the instructor refine the scoring rubric for future assessments.

Suggestions for Using Scoring Rubrics for Program Outcomes Assessment

- Faculty can use scoring rubrics in a variety of ways for outcomes assessment at the program level.
  - Faculty can use a scoring rubric in courses and aggregate the data across the courses.
  - Faculty can individually assess student products (e.g., portfolios) and then aggregate the data.
  - Faculty can participate in group readings in which they review student products together and discuss what they found.
  - Field work supervisors or community professionals may also be invited to assess student work using rubrics.

- A well-designed rubric should allow evaluators to efficiently focus on defined student learning outcomes while reviewing complex student work, such as a cumulative project, without getting bogged down in the details.

- Clarifying the scoring rubric is likely to improve both inter-rater reliability (i.e., all faculty will score student work the same) and intra-rater reliability (e.g., one faculty member will score student work in the same way across semesters). A scoring rubric with well-defined categories should assist in maintaining consistent scoring regardless of who the rater is or when the rating is completed.

- Rubrics should be pilot tested and evaluators should agree on appropriate classifications for a set of student products that vary in quality. If two evaluators apply the rubric to each product, inter-rater reliability should be examined. Once the data are collected, faculty discuss results to identify program strengths and areas of concern, “closing the loop” by using assessment data to make changes to improve student learning.

- One method of further clarifying a scoring rubric is through the use of anchor papers. Anchor papers are a set of scored responses that illustrate the nuances of the rubric. A given rater may refer to the anchor papers throughout the scoring process to illuminate the differences between the score levels.

- Faculty can get “double duty” out of their grading by using a common rubric that is used for grading and program SLO assessment. Individual faculty may elect to
use the common rubric in different ways, combining it with other grading components as they see fit.