Choosing the Right Assessment Method:
Commercially Produced or Standardized Tests

Definition:

Commercially produced or standardized tests can include any one of the following: licensure, certification, or subject area tests. These tests are utilized to measure student competencies under controlled conditions. They are developed and measured nationally to determine the level of learning that students have acquired in specific fields of study. This type of assessment should be included at the program level if the program involves a terminal licensing exam for a student’s future employment.

Advantages:
• Objectively scored by an outside agency.
• Can be implemented quickly.
• Reduces faculty time demands on instrument development and scoring.
• Results can be compared to other student populations overtime at an institution and across colleges.

Disadvantages:
• May limit what can be measured.
• May be outdated.
• Unlikely to completely measure program level outcomes.
• Typically provide summary data only (i.e., a student’s overall score on the exam).
• Results are highly susceptible to misinterpretation/misuse both within and outside the institution.
• In most instances, the student or program must pay for the exam.

Ways to Reduce Disadvantages:
• Choose an exam carefully. Faculty should review all available instruments and determine a match between the test and the program’s curriculum.
• Whenever possible, faculty should request reliability and validity data from the test publishers.
• Utilize the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which can review results of reports and create custom summary reports that may be more beneficial for the program’s assessment.