

Including Students In the Loop

Biannual Newsletter From the University Assessment Committee



Although too often left out of the assessment conversation, when meaningfully included, students can promote their understanding of their own educational experiences and outcomes, inform institutional practices, and help further engage faculty in assessment that is deeply embedded in the teaching and learning process (Kuh 21).

Dear Colleagues,

It is with mixed emotions that I write my final welcome message for the biannual University Assessment Committee newsletter, *In the Loop!* As I head into retirement, I find myself reflecting on my 10 years at USF, during the entirety of which I chaired the University Assessment Committee (UAC).

One of my first realizations on stepping into this role a decade ago was that the committee's success would depend not only on technical expertise in assessment but also on building trust and shared purpose among colleagues from diverse disciplines, including a shared understanding that assessment should support — not constrain — academic creativity. The UAC has provided the community with needed leadership and stability in building that trust. As a result, USF now has a culture of assessment that is fully committed to being inclusive, equitable, and just. I am particularly proud of the ongoing series sponsored by the UAC and led by Marisa McCarthy on Addressing Bias and Racism in Assessment, which has furthered a culture of equity.

The UAC has actively worked to improve processes for assessment and program review through trainings, resources, and guidelines. This work has included the complete overhaul, led by Melissa Thompson, of materials supporting the Academic Program Review. Programs report that the new guidelines and resources are easier to use, more transparent, and focused — as they should be — on improvement of student learning. It pleases me immensely whenever I see the impact assessment and program review results have had on our decision-making. I now see academic program changes based on the latest assessment data collected within departments and in a system that is accessible and transparent. While there is still much to improve, the university now approaches assessment with a stronger sense of ownership and purpose.

We have also sought to create new spaces for transparency and connection, including the creation of this very newsletter, led by Katie Hoffman, and now in its 12th edition! This newsletter is a place to promote knowledge of ongoing assessment across the university and inspire reflection and engagement in academic and co-curricular assessment within programs, departments, or teams. Be on the lookout in this edition for a new section, titled "Students in the Loop," which is directed and dedicated to increasing student learning about assessment.

After a decade in the role, I step back with gratitude for the colleagues, several of whom have served even longer than I have, who contributed their time and insight to the committee's work. Each and every one continually demonstrates their sustained commitment to shape a culture of evidence-based teaching and learning across the institution. Our progress has been collective, and the foundations we have built will continue to support future efforts to understand and improve how our students learn.

It has been an honor to serve with you, and I will miss working with you.

Deborah

Deborah Panter JD
Associate Vice Provost for Educational Effectiveness
Office of the Provost | Academic Affairs



Announcements

Assessment-Related Events & Upcoming Conferences

Engineering Program Achieves Accreditation

The Executive Committee of the Engineering Accreditation Commission has granted **ABET accreditation** to our Engineering program, effective **Oct. 1, 2023, through Sept. 30, 2031**. This recognition affirms the quality, rigor, and distinctiveness of USF's Engineering program and represents an important milestone for the College of Arts and Sciences. We extend our sincere appreciation to Hana Mori, who led this complex process on behalf of the college, and to the numerous faculty and staff who contributed to this multi-year effort.

ABET

Accredited Programs

University of San Francisco
San Francisco, California, United States

Engineering (General) (Bachelor of Science in Engineering)
Accredited: Oct 1, 2023 – Present
Accredited Locations: Main Campus
Date of Next Comprehensive Review: 2030–2031
Accredited By: Engineering Accreditation Commission
Program Criteria: Engineering, General Engineering, Engineering Physics, and Engineering Science
International Mutual Recognition Agreement: [Washington Accord](#) | [Bilateral Engineers Canada](#)

Upcoming Event! Series on Addressing Bias and Racism in Assessment

Look for an announcement regarding the spring 2026 iteration of the University Assessment Committee's **Series on Addressing Bias and Racism in Assessment**. Funded by the Jesuit Foundation, the aim of the series is to raise awareness of the racism and biases that persist in assessment practices at institutions of higher education and at USF and to help faculty and staff identify implicit and explicit biases in assessment.

Upcoming Conferences

- April 8–10 | San Francisco | **WSCUC Accreditation Resource Conference**
- April 8–11 | Los Angeles | **National Council on Measurement in Education Annual Meeting**
- April 15–18 | Tucson, Arizona & Virtual | **AAC&U Conference on Learning and Student Success**
- May 4–6 | Virtual (Free) | **Peralta Equity in Online Learning Conference**
- June 9–10 | Virtual | **AALHE Annual Assessment Conference**
- June 22–24 | Austin, Texas | **National Conference on Student Assessment**

Students in the Loop

Assessment Information Dedicated to Students

Welcome to *Students In the Loop*, the newest section of our *In the Loop!* newsletter. This section was inspired by the SONHP Program Evaluation Committee student representatives, who proposed an expansion of the newsletter's audience with a student-focused section. In this issue, we will focus on the two most common questions students may have about assessment of programs and student outcomes, which are the **WHAT** (is this type of assessment) and the **WHY** (do we do this type of assessment).

Q: WHAT is the assessment of programs and student outcomes?

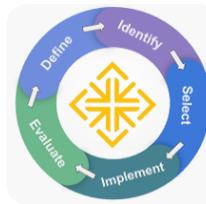
A: *Program assessment* is the systematic process that programs, schools, colleges, and universities use to evaluate how well an academic program (like a major, degree, or certificate) is achieving what it intends to accomplish. Program assessment looks at the measurement of *student learning* and *program outcomes*. *Program outcomes* measure program performance in achieving the program's goals, while *student outcomes* measure what students are expected to know, be able to do or achieve, and value by the time they complete a course or their degree or certificate program.

For example, a *program outcome* may be data like the rates of on-time graduation, obtaining the professional license or credential (e.g., licensed registered nurse,

psychologist, or marriage and family therapist), and employment of graduates; whereas an example of a *student learning outcome* may include the students' ability to design and implement evidence-based practice(s). A program then uses the performance on the Final Quality Improvement Project to determine if the program's students have learned the knowledge and skills that are needed to design and implement evidence-based practices. So, a program assessment answers core questions like, "Are students learning the knowledge and skills that are essential for a graduate of the program?" (student learning outcome) and "Is the program achieving its goals?" (program outcomes).

Q: WHY is program assessment important?

A: It is a "self-assessment" that helps programs understand what is going well and what needs to be updated, changed, added, removed, or improved. The process of program assessment has a focus on program-level improvement rather than looking at an individual's (student, faculty, or alumni) performance. Programs use the results of a program assessment to improve courses, curriculum, teaching methods, and/or student support.



Assessment is a part of a systemic *continuous quality improvement cycle (CQI)*. CQI helps programs to stay effective, data-informed in their decisions, accountable, and student outcomes-centered.

Learn more about the program and student learning assessment »

By *Megan O'Banion PsyD*, Senior Associate Dean, School of Nursing and Health Professions

Magis Methods

Assessment-Related Tips & Resources

Excerpt From *Advancing Communication: Sharing Stories That Improve Student Success* by Dan Shapiro

Selected by *Mark Meritt PhD*, Faculty Director of Curriculum Development, Humanities, Professor and Chair, Rhetoric and Language

It goes without saying that if we want assessment to be more equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive, we must include a diverse array of student voices during all stages of assessment [...]. There are many ways students can inform communication efforts. For example, we can ask students:

- What they think we should assess;
- How they think we should assess;
- What they want to know about assessment;
- To participate in the analysis and interpretation of assessment results;
- To provide feedback on the clarity and effectiveness of assessment reports before they are finalized;
- To share and discuss assessment results with their peers in a variety of contexts (e.g., student government); and
- To provide advice on helping all students better understand and communicate what they have learned as a result of completing our institution's courses and programs. (Shapiro 210)

Notes From the Field

Assessment Stories From USF Departments & Units

Changing the Health of the World from Here: Assessment of Public Health Education at USF

By *Laura Chyu PhD*, Associate Professor, BSPH Program Director, School of Nursing and Health Professions, Recipient of the Educational Effectiveness Award 2025

Public health is a rapidly evolving field, shaped by persistent health inequities, an increasing burden of chronic diseases, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, mental health challenges, and the global impact of climate change. To prepare students to navigate this complex, shifting landscape, public health education must adapt and evolve as well. Assessment is an essential tool for ensuring that our programs remain relevant, rigorous, and responsive to the needs of communities and the public health workforce.

Assessment provides a framework and process for addressing important questions: Are our students gaining the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the public health workforce? Are our courses and experiential learning opportunities preparing students to respond responsibly and ethically to complex public health challenges? How can we better fulfill our mission to educate the hearts and minds of our students? How can we continue to improve the educational experience we offer?

Assessment is not only about measuring academic and career outcomes. It also provides insight into how well we are living our Jesuit values, including cura personalis, or care for the whole person.

As a member of the School of Nursing and Health Professions and Public Health Program Evaluation Committees, I participate in ongoing efforts to evaluate how well our Bachelor of Science in Public Health and Master of Public Health programs are

meeting academic, research, and service goals. Our assessment work touches on many aspects of the student experience. Each year, we evaluate course learning outcomes to ensure that students are developing core public health competencies, such as data analysis, health communication, program planning, and community engagement. We examine students' capstone projects and internship experiences, in which they apply classroom learning in community and professional settings. We also gather feedback from graduating students, alumni, faculty, staff, and public health employers. These perspectives help us understand how well our programs prepare students for careers in public health or for further graduate studies, and where we can change and improve.

This year, much of our assessment work is focused on preparing for reaccreditation by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the national accrediting body for schools and programs of public health.



The reaccreditation process includes a comprehensive self-study and a site visit scheduled for December 2026. This rigorous process offers an important opportunity to reflect on our strengths, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that we continue to provide exceptional public health education.

Assessment is not only about measuring academic and career outcomes. It also provides insight into how well we are living our Jesuit values, including *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person. Recognizing that student success extends beyond academic achievements, we take a holistic approach that values physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being, as well as the unique experiences, strengths, and aspirations each student brings to USF. We strive to create a learning environment rooted in authentic connection and intentional support, one that encourages personal growth alongside professional development. Through our assessment efforts, we have learned that a strong sense of belonging and community is meaningful to our students. We cultivate this through supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers; access to a wide range of campus resources; and opportunities to participate in social, professional, and service-oriented activities.

At its core, assessment helps to ensure that our Public Health programs prepare students not only with the technical knowledge and skills to be competent public health practitioners, but also with the integrity to be compassionate and ethical leaders committed to health and social justice and lifelong learning.

Works Cited in This Issue

Kuh, George D. *Using Evidence of Student Learning to Improve Higher Education*. Jossey-Bass, 2015. EBSCOhost, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=797f997f-e68f-3550-9c07-4e96015222a2.

Shapiro, Dan. "Advancing Communication: Sharing Stories That Improve Student Success." *Advancing Assessment for Student Success: Supporting Learning by Creating Connections across Assessment, Teaching, Curriculum, and Co-curriculum in Collaboration with Our Colleagues and Students*, edited by Amy Driscoll, et al. 2021. EBSCOhost, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=0c23dd1e-2efb-3976-ba29-0f3d5630cf46.

Submit to In the Loop!

We want to feature your assessment experiences in the next edition of *In the Loop*! Please email your ideas to [Katie Hoffman](mailto:khoffman@usfca.edu).

If you are looking for support with academic and co-curricular program reviews, the Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support (OAAS) can help. Please email [Deborah Panter](mailto:Deborah.Panter@usfca.edu), call (415) 422-4588, or visit the [OAAS website](https://www.usfca.edu/oaas) for more information.

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE



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