Understanding Terms and Definitions for Assessment and Evaluation

Understanding and using the correct terminology is essential to successfully completing any process. The terms and definitions used in this handbook are listed below.

**FORM 201B** -- template that presents an academic unit’s assessment plan. The plan’s assessment instruments should be administered to each student in the corresponding academic program. An assessment plan states the program’s mission, student learning outcomes, assessment instruments, and criteria. All undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs should prepare and document assessment plan implementation and results via Forms 201BC and 201C.

**FORM 201BC** – template that presents an academic unit’s reporting on its assessment plan and implementation (Form 201B). The template contains sections that allow the assessment coordinator to describe departmental assessment processes, data collection and analysis, use of the data to consider and make improvements, and publicizing of student learning. The assessment report template is used together with Form 201C.

**FORM 201C** – template for trend-data form. Academic units must report the results of their use of each assessment instrument in the program assessment plan (Form 201B), consistent with the narrative in the program assessment report (Form 201BC) in three-year cycles, during which time the department should consider implications of the assessment data and make changes for quality improvement to assure and advance student learning.

**RETENTION RATE** – refers to the rate at which a cohort of students is retained from one academic year to the next. This is currently measured for first-time, full-time freshman undergraduate cohorts of students from their initial Fall semester of enrollment to the subsequent Fall semester. Retention should be considered as a high priority program outcome for academic units and, indirectly, for all units relative to their program outcomes.

**ASSESSMENT** – Assessment refers to the process of measuring the extent to which a unit accomplishes its learning outcomes. Assessment entails the collection of data through implementation of an assessment plan and its instruments, analyzing the measured results, and using those results to make improvements for further enhancing the program/unit’s quality in terms of learning.

**EVALUATION** – Evaluation refers to the process of measuring the effectiveness of a unit’s efforts to accomplish its program outcomes, as distinct from assessment, which is the process of measuring a unit’s efforts to accomplish its learning outcomes. Evaluation entails the collection of data through the implementation of a unit’s assessment instruments for measuring program outcomes, analyzing the measured results, and using those results to make improvements for further enhancing the program/unit’s quality in terms of its program outcomes.
GRADUATION RATE – see below

PME – an acronym for the phrase “Planning, Measurement, and Effectiveness”. This term refers to the annualized process whereby units proffer plans that link their subsequent year’s budget request to specific actions for accomplishing the unit’s learning outcomes and program outcomes, as well as assessment and evaluation of those outcomes. Each unit with a university appropriated budget must prepare a draft plan and revise based upon the budget process and feedback from the University Assessment Committee. The adopted PME plan for a fiscal year must be reported upon, with all data used to inform the subsequent year’s PME plan. PME planning makes concrete the university’s efforts to realize its strategic plan and to link strategic planning to budgeting and assessment/evaluation.

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT – refers to the assessment of an academic unit’s courses that are approved as meeting university general education requirements. Each course is assessed for all taught sections each long semester (Fall and Spring). Forms 201BC and 201C are utilized in their general education versions for reporting the results of data analysis and consideration of changes for continuous quality improvement.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT – refers to the assessment of an academic degree program’s required courses and learning experiences, according to the program’s academic degree program assessment plan (Form 201B). This plan contains at minimum three assessment instruments (two direct and one indirect assessment), together with quantifiable criteria, that measure the extent to which the program’s learning outcomes have been achieved. Data reported in annual assessment reports (Form 201BC and 201C) are the basis for making program improvements.

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION – assessment of non-instructional units occurs through the mechanism of annual planning (PME – Planning, Measurement, and Effectiveness). Non-instructional units identify learning and program (i.e. non-learning outcomes), as well as assessment instruments and criteria of effectiveness for all outcomes. Reporting occurs annually, using the PME Plan Report.

PME ANNUAL PLAN AND REPORT – each fiscal year, instructional and non-instructional units complete a draft annual plan for the subsequent fiscal year, as well as a year-end annual plan report, based upon assessment of the current year’s annual plan. PME annual plans incorporate the basic elements of assessment for all university unit’s with an appropriated budget. The plans directly relate unit goals, objectives, and outcomes to budget priorities that inform the unit’s request for reallocated, new, long-range and capital spending requests. Annual plans also incorporate changes for quality improvement based upon assessment data, as identified in PME Reports.

CRITERION – a quantifiable mark of relative effectiveness. A criterion may be posited either as a benchmark for future re-evaluation, or as a target, i.e. desired, level of attainment. A criterion may be one quantifiable measure within a range (such as a Likert scale) used to establish a dimension of relative effectiveness for a unit’s assessment purposes.
OBJECTIVE – an objective is a unit’s statement of the end results to be obtained in pursuing a particular unit goal, be it a strategic goal or an annual plan goal. Whereas a goal identifies a desired end over a period of time, as in over the life of a strategic plan, an objective identifies what is desired in the short-term, as within one year for annual planning.

BENCHMARK – an initial criterion statement of effectiveness identified by a unit with respect to assessment of an outcome. Benchmarks may be qualitative or quantitative, although annual planning requires quantitative benchmarks.

TARGET – a final or most desired criterion statement of effectiveness identified by a unit with respect to assessment of an outcome. Targets may be qualitative or quantitative, although annual planning requires quantitative targets.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS – concerns the extent to which an institution achieves its purposes and goals. It provides an index, through qualitative and quantitative measures, of the extent to which students have met curricular outcomes, mastered their professional areas and received appropriate learning resources, student services and administrative support. Institutional effectiveness also has been referred to as “evaluation,” “assessment,” or “student outcome assessment.” Definitions for institutional effectiveness vary among experts in the field, but the reasons an institution engages in the process are basically the same: to improve the quality of academic programs and the institution; to make decisions for future resources, programs, and student needs; and to meet external agencies’ criteria. An effective institutional effectiveness model by necessity uses multiple indicators to provide evidence for judging quality.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (MISSION) – establishes a clearly defined purpose that is appropriate for the university and provides a general direction for academic and non-academic programs and operations.

STRATEGIC GOALS – further define the aim of university, and should encompass every critical aspect of university.

STRATEGIC PLAN – describes the major strategic goals in the planning process that a college or university employs to address the issues of long-term planning, environmental scanning, and responses to institutional effectiveness. The plan is usually a five-year planning document, endorsed by the Chicago State University Board of Trustees, and developed with input from representatives of faculty, staff, and administration.

COLLEGE/DEPARTMENT/DIVISION/UNIT STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (MISSION) – defines the values, philosophy, roles and scope of the academic departments or administrative/support offices (units) as they relate to the college’s statement of purpose and the university’s mission.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES – describe the tasks which the academic department or administrative office intends to accomplish in a specific timeframe. Outcomes are developed by the academic department, faculty members or by the administrator and staff of an office and are
supportive of the mission of the university. Outcomes may be sub-defined as learning and program (i.e. non-learning/non-academic) outcomes. Many departments and offices (units) of the university may have both learning and program outcomes.

(STUDENT) LEARNING OUTCOMES — define the expected educational results that each student should obtain upon the completion of that major activities for academic programs and administrative/support offices – describe the expected results that the unit should obtain upon completion of a service provided to students, faculty, staff or program. Outcomes describe what the department or office (unit) intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective, attitudinal), or do (behavioral, performance, psychomotor) when they have completed a given educational program. In the first instance, learning outcomes relate to academic units and their efforts to accomplish student learning, but in a wider sense, learning outcomes relate to every unit at the university with respect to the unit’s end-users.

ASSESSMENT and EVALUATION PLAN – outline the specific instruments and metrics that will be used to analyze the extent to which the unit has achieved its learning and/or administrative outcomes. The plan is designed to evaluate the extent to which the intended outcomes are being achieved through regular gathering and analysis of data. For each outcome, the plan includes defining evaluation instruments, metrics (performance criteria), and identifies their relationship to the strategic plan goals.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) – the metrics or criteria that a specific department or office (unit) uses to measure relative attainment of the unit’s outcomes. A program uses KPIs to demonstrate its effectiveness. They also provide a clear indication of the degree to which improvements must be made to a unit if the performance standard is not met. There are three levels of KPIs: strategic plan/ university-wide KPIs, divisional KPIs, and unit-level KPIs.

- Strategic plan/university-wide KPIs are standardized for all applicable university units.
- Divisional KPIs are standardized for all applicable units within a particular division (e.g. Academic Affairs, Enrollment Management, etc.)
- Unit-level KPIs are defined by the unit and apply to the particular unit.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION REPORT – summarizes the progress/status of performance to meet the unit’s outcomes relative to that unit’s key performance indicators (KPIs).

DEPARTMENT PROGRAM REVIEW – cyclical, comprehensive, internal review of a specific unit of the university, including the strengths, areas for improvement, and future development plans for that unit. Program Reviews are scheduled on a five-year cycle but may occur sooner and more frequently if there is a concern.

UNIT – in its strictest sense, a university unit defines a particular or distinct office or department at the university with an operating budget/account that uses appropriated funds.
Definitions related to determining graduation and retention rates for the University are defined by IPEDS calculations:

**GRADUATION RATE** -- IPEDS defines the graduation rate by the initial cohort of all students who enter an institution as full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking students during the fall term of the academic year who complete their program within 150 percent of the normal time to completion. Full-time is indicated as a student enrolled for 12 eligible credit hours.

**RETENTION RATE** -- IPEDS defines the retention rate by the percentage of the initial cohort of all students (who enter the institution as full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking students) who re-enroll or complete their program at the institution in the fall term one-year following their initial enrollment from the previous fall term at the institution. This is the rate at which students persist in their education program at the institution.

**TRANSFER-OUT RATE** -- IPEDS defines the transfer-out rate as the percent of students in the initial cohort who have left the institution and enroll in another institution within 150 percent of the normal time to completion. This rate can be attached to the retention rate as well as the graduation rates of the institutions to supplement information on student persistence and degree completion.

**Additional Notes**

There is discussion on collecting transfer student graduation rates at the federal and state governing bodies to collect data on transfer students giving the growing number of transfers and non-traditional students in higher education. Transfer students will more than likely be defined as “first-time” new enrollees to the transfer institution. The rate will be calculated based on the enrollment status of the transfer student (i.e., first-time and full-time) similar to the definition of freshman cohorts.

Chicago State University’s unique history of being a transfer “serving” institution where more than 50% of its new student population is comprised of transfer students, will benefit greatly from this additional collection of data as our transfer rates are more closely aligned with the national average graduate rate for public-four institutions.