PLANNING FOR INTERFAITH ASSESSMENT:

A Guide for Assessing Students' Learning and Development

Carefully planning your interfaith assessment leads to an efficient process and—most importantly—useful assessment findings. IFYC's two-part assessment planning resources help you determine what you should assess (Part 1) and how to do so (Part 2). If you have not already completed First Steps for Effective Interfaith Assessment: What Should I Assess? (Part 1), we suggest you start with that document if you are unclear what to assess. If you have completed Part 1—or if you already know you want to assess students' learning and development—you are ready to begin this assessment planning workbook (Part 2).

This resource can be used by anyone who wants or needs to collect information about what students learn from interfaith programs and/or the effectiveness of their interfaith programs.

Completing the following workbook will enable you to develop a clear assessment plan and timeline for completing your interfaith assessment. It covers each step of the assessment planning process, providing all the information you need to prepare your interfaith assessment project.

The workbook is divided into four steps with specific questions to answer. You can use this workbook individually or collectively as a structure for group work related to assessing students' learning and development. You can complete the workbook all at once, or you may wish to take more time to discuss the information with others.

Planning Your Interfaith Assessment: A Brief Overview

This workbook provides information related to the following four steps involved in planning an effective assessment project (Henning & Roberts, 2016):

- ▶ **Step 1:** Specify your assessment purpose (what you want to learn) and assessment question (what you will ask in order to learn this)
- ▶ **Step 2:** Determine the information you need to collect to answer your assessment question
- ▶ **Step 3:** Develop a plan for analyzing and interpreting your assessment findings
- ▶ **Step 4:** Develop a strategy for sharing and using your assessment findings

For each of these four steps, you will answer specific questions that directly map to your interfaith assessment timeline below. You can use the timeline to understand the various steps of your interfaith assessment project and to keep things organized.

Interfaith Assessment Timeline

Assessment Planning Step	Key Considerations	Notes	Deadline
Step 1: Learning Outcome(s)	**Determine outcome(s) to assess.** (Will you assess all outcomes or only particular outcomes?) [See answer to question #3]		
Step 1: Assessment Question(s)	**Develop an assessment question.** [See answer to question #3]		
Step 2: Collect Information	**Identify any existing information that helps to answer the assessment question.** [See answer to question #4]		
Step 3: Assessment Evidence	**Determine whether you will collect direct or indirect evidence of students' learning.** [See answer to question #5]		
Step 3: Assessment Method	**Determine what method(s) you will use to collect assessment evidence.** [See answer to question #6]		
	Identify how to recruit student participants and how many will be recruited.		
	Determine when data collection will happen.		
Step 4: Assessment Findings	**Determine how assessment data will be analyzed and by whom.** [See answers to questions #8 and #9]		
	Determine who will interpret the data analyses so that they directly answer the assessment question(s). [See answer to question #9]		
	Identify specific audiences for and approaches to sharing assessment findings. [See answers to questions #11 and #12]		
	Determine how assessment results can be used. [See answer to question #13]		
Make Informed Changes	**Implement specific recommendations based on assessment findings.**		
	Determine when assessment will happen again to determine the recommendations' effectiveness.		

Step 1: Develop your interfaith assessment question

By now, you should have already written your assessment purpose statement using the First Steps for Effective Interfaith Assessment: What Should I Assess? resource. If you have determined that the purpose of your interfaith assessment is to understand students' learning and development related to interfaith programming, the next step is to develop a specific assessment question. Your assessment question guides exactly what you will assess. It asks a specific question that the information you collect will answer. Assessment questions will be different for every program, so selecting a single program to assess is important.

In order to develop your assessment question, answer the two questions that follow:

1. What program do you want to assess? _____

2. Does this program have learning outcomes? ❑ Yes   ❑ No

To determine students' learning and development, the program you want to assess must have in place learning outcomes, which explain what students should know or be able to do as a result of participating in interfaith programming. You will need to specify the program's precise learning outcomes in your assessment question. Doing so serves two purposes. First, this clarifies what you are attempting to answer through your interfaith assessment question for those conducting the assessment and for those with whom you eventually share your assessment findings. Second, this guides the particular types of information to collect to answer your assessment question.

Does the program you want to assess already have learning outcomes? Use the guide below to identify your next steps.

My program has existing learning outcomes.	My program does not have existing learning outcomes.
1. Use your program's existing learning outcomes to write your assessment question below. *Your assessment question becomes:* As a result of participating in [**program name**], can students [**insert existing learning outcomes here**]?	1. Assessing student learning begins with creating learning outcomes. Your program can create learning outcomes using IFYC's Creating Interfaith Learning Outcomes or Learning Outcomes Bank resources. 2. Once your program creates learning outcomes, you can use these to write your assessment question below. *Your assessment question becomes:* As a result of participating in [**program name**], can students [**insert newly developed learning outcomes here**]?

Here is an example of an assessment question related to students' learning and development:

As a result of participating in _____ the interfaith leadership retreat _____ ,

can students __describe effective ways for building relationships with diverse others, explain__

__strategies to promote interfaith cooperation among the student body, and identify their__

__personal biases related to interfaith work__ _____ ?

Now you can write your interfaith assessment question by filling in the information below.

3. As a result of participating in _____ ,

can students _____

_____

_____ ?

Step 2: What information should I collect?

Once you write your assessment question, you need to determine the information required to answer that question. It is useful to think about the information you need to collect for an assessment in terms of information already known about the program AND information needed.

What do you *already* know?

Many campus educators already have a lot of information about their interfaith programs, such as the types and numbers of programs offered, who participates in those programs, and students' overall perceptions of the programs (i.e., students' satisfaction). If you are already collecting some of this information, that's a great place to start. You should include this information as part of your assessment of students' learning and development because it provides important context about your program and participants. Typically, such information is included in the beginning of an assessment report to describe a program before reporting the types of learning and development that program facilitated.

Collecting information about students' learning

Assessing whether students have achieved particular learning outcomes requires us to gather information—or evidence—that demonstrates their learning. We can collect information in the form of both direct and indirect evidence (Maki, 2004).

Direct evidence of learning requires students to in some way demonstrate what they have learned through something they produce or enact. For instance, students can take a test, write a paper, construct a portfolio, or deliver a presentation or performance. In each of these instances, students have opportunities to demonstrate particular knowledge or skills. In some cases, direct evidence can be assessed by using a rubric (i.e., something that outlines the main criteria to be assessed and indicators of different levels of learning within each of those criteria). For example, someone might use the Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric to determine the extent to which a student's written reflection demonstrates attitudes toward pluralism (one of the criteria included in this rubric). Students' work is typically scored using the rubric and a determination of the amount of learning is derived from that score. Direct evidence of students' learning is particularly compelling since students are actually demonstrating the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills through their work. However, particular types of learning and development (e.g., attitudes, values, and beliefs) can be difficult to demonstrate through the types of student work described, and scoring each individual student's work takes time.

Direct evidence of learning is based on students' demonstration of knowledge or skills gained. Evidence one could collect can include:

- Presentations or performances
- Journals/reflections
- Student projects
- Portfolios
- Tests
- Case studies
- Student writing samples
- Assignments

Indirect evidence of learning is based on students' self-reported perception of their learning and development, not their actual work. Students' perceptions can be gathered by:

- A variety of surveys (this can include post-program surveys, exit surveys, or other institutional surveys)
- Student focus groups
- Student interviews

Indirect evidence of learning requires students to reflect on their learning and development rather than actually demonstrate these. Indirect assessment represents students' *perceptions* of their learning and development (i.e., how much they think they have learned, grown, developed, or changed). These methods are particularly useful in assessing students' attitudes, values, and beliefs. However, indirect methods measure students' *perceptions*, not their actual work. So, specific knowledge and skill acquisition is often quite difficult or impossible to demonstrate using this evidence.

Answer the following question about the evidence you may already have for your assessment.

4. Do you already have any evidence of students' learning available to use for your assessment?

If so, list here**: _____**

_____

_____

_____.

How do I decide which type of evidence to collect?

Choosing between direct and indirect evidence is easier when you consider how each connects with your assessment purpose and the feasibility of gathering each type of evidence. Read on to learn more about these two considerations and to answer a few questions to help you decide.

Remember your assessment purpose

Your assessment purpose explains what is driving your interest in interfaith assessment, what you hope to learn from such an assessment, and how the assessment findings could be used. It is useful to consider these last two aspects in selecting the type of evidence to collect for your assessment.

What do you want to learn from your interfaith assessment? What type of information can best answer what you hope to learn? If your assessment is focused on students' learning and development, you are aiming to understand the extent of students' learning as a result of participating in your program. Recall that your program's learning outcomes specify the precise type of learning and development expected.

Consider whether your learning outcomes:	
Direct assessment evidence	**Indirect assessment evidence**
• Are more narrowly focused, requiring very specific information that could be collected through a single piece of student work, such as a presentation, project, or assignment? • Require students to actually *perform* or demonstrate specific knowledge or skills? • Require students to apply what they've learned? • Require students to synthesize or evaluate what they've learned?	• Are more varied, requiring a variety of information at once that could be asked about in a survey, focus group, or interview? • Require students to *reflect* on their learning or development? • Require students to reflect on aspects of programming that have promoted or hindered their learning?

How do you think you could use your assessment results? Remember your assessment purpose is also informed by those with whom you could share your assessment findings. What information is most useful for particular audiences?

Consider whether those who could benefit from your findings:	
Direct assessment evidence	**Indirect assessment evidence**
• Require evidence from students' actual work? • Benefit from understanding the ways students apply what they've learned? • Value students' actual work as the gold standard for demonstrating learning?	• Express an interest in understanding how students perceive their learning or development? • Have an interest in/need to understand programmatic aspects that might help/hinder their learning? • Value student narratives about their learning and/or engagement?

Feasibility

In addition to considering your assessment purpose, the evidence you choose to gather should be *feasible* for those doing the assessment and for the students who will be assessed. While it is possible to collect both direct and indirect evidence together in a single interfaith assessment project, it is often more feasible to choose one type of information to collect. Read on for important issues to consider in deciding.

Interfaith assessment must be feasible for those doing the assessment. For instance, in selecting the type of evidence to collect, considering the cost, time, and expertise required to develop a data collection tool (e.g., an assignment, rubric, survey, or focus group script), collect the data, and analyze and interpret the data collected are all important.

Assessment should also be feasible for students. Do you think students are willing and able to provide particular types of information? How easily can the information be collected from students? Does gathering particular types of evidence make it easier/more difficult for students to participate?

Consider the following feasibility issues in deciding on the types of assessment evidence to use:	
Direct assessment evidence	Indirect assessment evidence
• Does an activity, assignment, or other way to obtain students' actual work already exist in your program? If not, is it feasible to create this? • Do you already have a rubric developed to score students' work? If not, will you locate an already developed rubric or create a new one? • From how many students will you obtain work? • How many individuals will be required to score students' work?	• How likely are students to participate in a survey (usually shorter, convenient access) compared to a focus group or interview (usually longer, in-person)? • Is the timing of your survey/focus group/interviews conducive to students' schedules? • If using a survey, will you use an instrument that already exists? What is the cost to participate? If not, who will develop your survey? • How many individuals will be required to analyze survey/focus group/interview data?

After considering both your assessment purpose and feasibility, answer the following question about the evidence you will collect for your assessment:

5. Will you need to collect new (or additional) evidence? If so, will you choose direct or indirect evidence for your assessment?

_____

Types of assessment evidence:	
Direct evidence	**Indirect evidence**
• Presentations or performances • Journals • Student project • Portfolios • Tests • Case studies • Student writing samples • Assignments	• A variety of surveys (this can include post-program surveys, exit surveys, or other institutional surveys) • Student focus groups • Student interviews

Reminder:
These are the common direct and indirect forms of evidence co-curricular programs use to assess learning.

6. **What specific type of evidence listed above (e.g., student project, portfolio, survey results) will you collect for your assessment?**

_____

Next, you need to consider whether to use an existing rubric, survey, or focus group/interview script or develop your own. Check out IFYC's Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric for an example of an existing rubric to use in measuring students' learning. You may also find it useful to check out IFYC's Constructing Surveys: A Tip for Interfaith Educators, Interfaith Survey Bank, and Conducting Focus Groups: A Beginner's Guide for assistance in developing your own survey or focus group script.

Should you use existing assessment tools or create your own?	
Using existing assessment instruments	**Creating your own assessment instruments**
• Existing tools are readily available, so they do not consume resources to develop. • There may be a cost to participate in or use these tools. • It can be possible to benchmark (or compare) your results against peer institutions. • If using a survey, many are evaluated for validity (i.e., it measures what it claims to measure) and reliability (i.e., it measures consistently over time). • These tools may not precisely measure your program's learning outcomes.	• Developing your own tool allows you to completely customize it to your particular program, learning outcomes, student population, and institutional context. • This may be more cost-effective, but it may consume ample staff resources and time to develop the tool. • Developing your own tool requires some knowledge on how to construct effective surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews.

7. Does the type of evidence you listed above in question #6 already exist (e.g., an existing rubric, survey, or focus group/interview script), or will someone develop this?

_____

Step 3: Develop a plan for analyzing and interpreting your assessment findings

Once you collect the information—or data—you need to answer your assessment question and someone will need to analyze the data and interpret the assessment findings. This makes the data understandable, and therefore usable in answering your assessment question. Remember that collecting direct or indirect evidence of students' learning requires different ways to analyze assessment data. For example:

- Some direct assessment requires the use of a rubric or evaluating a test/assignment to score students' learning.
- Indirect assessment requires analyzing either survey data or focus group/interview transcripts or notes.

8. What resources (i.e., knowledge, staff, collaborations) will be required to analyze your assessment data?

_____

_____

Pulling in additional individuals to help in analyzing and interpreting your assessment findings is often expected and useful. For example, you may wish to ask someone working in an institutional research or assessment capacity at your institution for assistance with any statistical analyses or in interpreting focus group or interview transcripts.

9. Who will analyze your assessment data? List those individuals here:

_____

10. When will these data analyses happen?

_____

Analyzing assessment data is necessary in order to answer your assessment question. However, interpreting your analyses is sometimes the most difficult part. Interpretation involves translating numbers (for those using surveys or scoring tests) and students' narratives (for those using focus groups or assignments) into actionable insights. This is critical in sharing and ultimately using your assessment findings.

Step 4: Develop a strategy for sharing and using your assessment findings

Finally, a key part of interfaith assessment involves sharing assessment results and using these findings to implement *informed change*. Sharing and using assessment results are two different components of the interfaith assessment process. Considerations related to both components are described below.

What is the value of sharing assessment results?

We want to share our assessment results with others for a few reasons. First, if we seek to do assessment for purposes of understanding and improving our interfaith programs, sharing our assessment findings with others often allows for different perspectives on how to best improve programming. Second, in terms of accountability and transparency, assessment findings provide important information for others to understand your program, its purposes, its effectiveness, and areas of opportunity and how you might address those. Interfaith assessment is a powerful way to tell your program's story.

With whom should you share assessment results?

Next, recall that it is useful to explain with whom, specifically, you will share your assessment findings. You have already considered this in Step 2, when you decided between direct and indirect evidence to collect for your assessment project. It is also critical to consider various audiences as these relate to sharing your final assessment results.

Once your assessment data have been analyzed and interpreted to answer your assessment question, you may notice findings you had not initially expected. There may be others on and off campus—in addition to the individuals/areas named above—who could benefit from your findings.

Tip: Think about all areas/individuals who can benefit from your assessment findings. Share your results!

11. **Who is interested in or could benefit from your assessment findings? For what reasons?**

_____

_____

How can we most effectively share assessment results?

In thinking through the most effective way to share your assessment findings, consider two aspects. First, who are your different audiences? Second—based on your audiences—what are the most appropriate ways to share your findings? Both are discussed here.

Who are your audiences for sharing assessment findings?

In sharing your assessment findings, it is important to consider *various* audiences so that your findings are communicated in the most useful way possible. You should customize how you share assessment results based on the various audiences with whom you anticipate sharing your results.

Remember that faculty, staff, *and students* can all benefit from learning about your interfaith assessment findings. Off-campus partners might also benefit from learning this information. Given this, key questions to answer in developing a strategy to share your results include:

- What are the most important implications of your findings as they relate to these specific audiences?
- What actions can various audiences take with your assessment findings?
- What level of communication is appropriate for particular audiences, and how does that influence what we share?

What are useful methods for sharing assessment findings?

Finally, once you have understood the importance of sharing your assessment results and with whom you will share your findings, considering how to share your information is useful. Different methods of sharing your information are more appropriate for particular audiences.

Consider the following in thinking through how you will report your findings:

Assessment Reports
- Organize and synthesize a lot of useful information for different audiences.
- Prepare reports with specific audiences in mind.
- Consider comprehensive reports as well as brief and focused versions for particular audiences.

Presentations
- Discuss your findings with your own colleagues, broader divisional staff, faculty, and even colleagues at other institutions.
- Deliver the information in a more interactive format than reports, but still consider your different audiences.
- Emphasize the actions various audiences can take as a result of your assessment findings.

Web/Virtual Spaces
- Post your assessment findings to program, divisional, or institution-wide websites.
- Use interactive features on websites that allow visitors to learn about the assessment findings of most interest.
- Use social media to communicate brief snippets related to your assessment findings, namely to students.
- Use infographics as a way to explain your assessment findings more visually. Check out this infographic that presents key findings from the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey at https://www.ifyc.org/resources/campus-religious-and-spiritual-climate-survey-infographic.

Other Modes
- Reach staff, faculty, students, alumni, and/or the general public through newsletters, newspapers, and institutional magazines.
- Highlight assessment in action through divisional or institutional assessment summits, conferences, or other events.
- Celebrate a broader culture of assessment at your institution by sharing multiple areas'

assessment findings and implications.

12. **Given your intended audiences with whom you will share your assessment results, which methods for reporting your findings will be most useful?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How do we use assessment results?

Now that you have learned the importance of and strategies for sharing your interfaith assessment findings, considering the various uses of your assessment findings is also critical. A central purpose of assessment is to implement informed change. In other words, assessment requires us to use the findings we generate to learn more about our programs and potential changes or improvements to these. But assessment findings extend beyond our programs, too. They often connect with division- or institution-wide efforts. In thinking through how you can use your assessment findings, it is useful to understand the types of decisions that can be informed with assessment results:

Your program efforts
- Inform resource allocation, including fiscal, physical, personnel, technological, and knowledge/skill resources
- Set program-specific priorities (i.e., what's working well, what needs improvement?)
- Inform program-specific strategic planning efforts
- Make specific improvements to programming
- Determine whether your program's learning outcomes are accurate
- Confirm the effectiveness of the program
- Change specific program content to align with learning outcomes
- Modify how program content is delivered

Departmental/divisional/institutional efforts
- Connect your program's learning outcomes and assessment findings with institution- and/or division-wide learning outcomes
- Connect your assessment findings with institution-wide assessment efforts
- Use your assessment findings to inform institutional strategic planning
- Report your assessment findings as part of your institutional accreditation efforts, as

accreditation processes want evidence of the systematic collection of information (i.e., assessment) AND the utilization of findings to make improvements (i.e., assessment)

13. Are there specific decisions that could be informed with your assessment findings?

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Conclusion

You are now ready to execute your interfaith assessment project! Now that you have provided answers to the key questions related to planning your interfaith assessment, you can use the interfaith timeline table toward the beginning of the workbook to develop a specific timeline for executing your assessment project. We also encourage you to check out the other IFYC assessment resources for additional information related to interfaith assessment.

References

Henning, G.W., & Roberts, D. (2016). *Student affairs assessment: Theory to practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for learning: Building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.