How to ask the right questions to get the information you want

(Or, how to get the information you need)
Is this what assessment means to you?

...and of course we'll assess our progress along the way.

Will you be using an enhanced assessment methodology?

I hope that means something. All I did was string together some words I heard in the hallway.

Um... I'll be assessing... by measuring... and um...

I'd better get in on this.

I can't support this project until I see your advanced assessment methodology plan.

I'll have it in ten minutes, assuming you don't know what it's supposed to look like.

Very good.

I'll be in the shower trying to wash my soul.
Workshop Approach

- Role of outcomes in answering questions
- Importance of clarifying the object of the assessment
- Importance of clarifying the action of the assessment
- Identification of different assessment methods and their strengths/weaknesses
- Tips for using the different approaches to get the best answers
- Resources in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness
## It Starts with an Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the efficiency of the registration process</td>
<td>Decrease the number of students who violate alcohol rules in the residence halls</td>
<td>Students will be able to identify three successful study behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clarity: Who or what are you assessing?

- Students
- Program Participants
- Steps in a Process
What are you measuring?

- Attitude
- Behavior
- Knowledge
- Process steps
- Other
What are you measuring and what do you need?

- Change in patterns
  - Example: Increase in participation (Pre and Post Test)
- Acceptable level of performance
  - Student mentors produce presentations that are sensitive to student issues
- Relationship between different variables
  - Students who participate in an orientation program have higher retention rates (Retention rate of those who participate and those who do not)
Select the most appropriate time to collect your assessment data:

- Which cycle in a process? (examples: event registration, training)
- Which semester? Fall? Summer? Spring?
- Before or after mid-terms?
- The first week of school?
Exercise 1
Two Important Concepts

- **Reliability** – Consistency with instrument
  - Make things as consistent as possible
  - Consistency in measurement
  - Quantitative Measures available in existing instruments
    *(Think of a scale: Does it measure the same each time?)*

- **Validity** – Does it measure what it is suppose to measure
  - Face validity
  - Content validity
    *(Think of a scale: Accurate weight each time? Is it measuring something else?)*
How to get from A to Z

- Direct Approaches - Observing Behavior
  - Checklists
  - Observations/Performance
- Indirect Approaches – Asking about Behavior
  - Focus Groups
  - Interviews
  - Surveys
  - Journals
Checklists

- Outline Key Items for Checklist
- Example: Check list for Student Leaders Planning an Event

**Example of a checklist for Residence Life Emergencies**

- Obtained signatures
- Attached request for security
- Catering order attached
- Description of event and estimated attendance attached
- Event budget attached
Observations

- **Examples:**
  - Presentations
  - Writing Samples
  - Direct Observation of some behavior

- **Need rubric to measure (see sample):**
  - Holistic Rubric
  - Analytical Rubric
  - Must clarify traits, know what you are looking for
Indirect Observations

- **Focus Groups (see handout)**
  - Key components
    - Script
    - Questions
    - Finding Time
  - Interviews (similar to focus groups)
  - Surveys
    - Tips to creating better questions
Exercise 2

- Examining Survey Questions
Writing Better Survey Items

- Identify type of question
  - Constructed response (essays)
    Example: How can we improve the orientation program?
  - Closed-ended response
## Using Available Resources from Institutional Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Data</th>
<th>Existing Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• GPA</td>
<td>• NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sex</td>
<td>(Freshmen and Seniors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Residency</td>
<td>• Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Major</td>
<td>(1 and 5 Years after Graduation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Year in school</td>
<td>• Graduating Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious affiliation</td>
<td>(Semester graduating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CIRP (starting 2012 - Freshmen)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advantages
- Richer Information, perhaps more detailed

Disadvantages
- Reliability
- Evaluating is time consuming
- Subjectivity
Closed-ended Response Survey Items

- **Different Types**
  - **Dichotomous**
    Ex: I have empathy for others:
    YES OR NO
  
  - **Forced-choice**
    Ex. A. *I usually feel confident in my abilities.*
    B. *I often lack confidence in my abilities.*
  
  - **Semantic differential**
    Ex. I usually feel ____ in my abilities.
    Not very ------------------------------------------Very Confident
Suggestions for Constructing Surveys

- Do not have double-barreled questions
  - Example: Please rate your agreement with the following: 
    *I am happiest during the morning and evening.*

- Make your questions concise

- Do not lead the participant:
  - Example: How positive do you feel about this?

- Use language that participant will understand

- Do not overlap
  - Example: When did you place your call:
    1 am to 2pm or 2pm to 3pm
Exercise 2
In Summary

- The Planning
  - The outcome must be clear. The following need to be defined:
    - Who is being assessed
    - What is being measured?
    - How is it being measured?
    - When is the best time to measure it?
In Summary

- The Method/Instrument
  - Needs to be clear
  - Written in language that the object of the assessment understands
  - Does not contain any form of “double-barrel”
  - Can be linked directly to the outcome
  - Administered at an appropriate time