

## Examining the Evidence: Assessment in Law Student Affairs

“Assessment, when done well, encourages student affairs staff to improve their programmes and services and to demonstrate how their work develops well-educated and productive citizens. Assessment signals to both internal and external stakeholders that student affairs is a respected profession that plays a vital role in improving higher education and student success.”

-Ann M. Gansemer-Topf, 2013

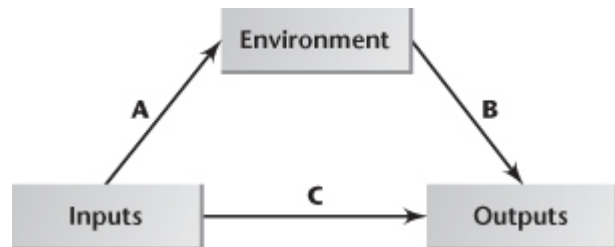
As the ABA pushes for greater academic assessment and non-curricular financial commitments undergo sustained scrutiny, law student affairs assessment is more relevant than ever before. Eschewing more technical definitions, assessment can be understood as the process of systematically gathering and using evidence about students, personnel, and programs to document and improve university practices. For external audiences, it allows student affairs professionals to show their accountability and communicate important aspects of their work. Internally, it helps professionals locate opportunities for improvement and focus on the most important elements of their division’s mission or strategic plan.

Student affairs assessment commonly include benchmarking comparisons against recommended standards, projects at other universities, and internal data from previous years. Student affairs professionals should practice particular caution before selecting external benchmarks, lest outward similarities hide relevant internal differences in student population, activated resources, or program objectives. In many cases, assessment projects benefit more from greater internal attention and a “deeper dive” into datasets like those produced by the Law School Survey of Student Engagement, disaggregating new layers of the student experience rather than concluding their analysis with a shallow comparison to perceived competitor schools.

In other cases, instruments like the National College Health Assessment or the Student Leadership Practices Inventory would fittingly address areas not covered by standard surveys of student engagement or satisfaction.



2. The Assessment Cycle  
Center for Assessment and Research Studies  
James Madison University



1. Astin's I-E-O College Impact Model

“Assessment in student affairs provides a unique space in which we can augment the efforts to help foster holistic development in students during their short time with us ... We are among those who seek to tell the story of student learning outside the classroom, and those who seek to understand what it is that students are getting out of college that may not be taught or integrated into the classroom alone.”

-Daniel W. Newhart, 2015

### **Additional Resources**

Five Ways to Prioritize Assessment in Your Work by Melinda Stoops -

<http://studentaffairsassessment.org/entries/blog/five-ways-to-prioritize-assessment-in-your-work>

The Role of Student Affairs in Student Learning Assessment by John Schuh and Ann M. Gansemer-Topf -

<http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/StudentAffairsRole.pdf>

Building a Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs: A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners by Gwendolyn J. Dungy, Marguerite M. Culp - Available for purchase through the NASPA bookstore and Amazon.com

Student Affairs Assessment Leaders - <http://studentaffairsassessment.org/>

ACPA Commission on Assessment and Evaluation - <http://www.myacpa.org/commae>

NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community -

<https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/kcs/assessment-evaluation-and-research>

JMU Center on Assessment and Research Studies -

<https://www.jmu.edu/assessment>

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