Summary of *Direct* Assessment Techniques

	DIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES (Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004)		
Technique	Potential Strength	Potential Limitations	
Published tests	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives Generally, are carefully developed, highly reliable, professionally scored, and nationally normed Frequently provide a number of norm groups, such as norms for community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive universities Online versions of tests are increasingly available, and some provide immediate scoring Some publishers allow faculty to supplement tests with their own items, so tests can be adapted to better serve local needs 	 If the test does not reflect the learning objectives that faculty value and the curricula that students experience, results are likely to be discounted and inconsequential Most published tests rely heavily on multiple-choice items that often focus on specific facts, but program learning objectives more often emphasize higher-level skills Test scores may reflect criteria that are too broad for meaningful assessment Students may not take the test seriously if test results have no impact on their lives Tests can be expensive The marginal gain from annual testing may be low. Faculty may object to standardized exam scores on general principles, leading them to ignore results 	
Locally developed tests	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives Appropriate mixes of items allow faculty to address various types of learning objectives Can provide for authentic assessment of higher-level learning Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning If well constructed, they are likely to have good validity Because local faculty write the exam, they are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them Can be integrated into routine faculty workloads Campuses with similar missions could decide to develop their own norms, and they could assess student work together or provide independent assessment of each other's student work Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it 	 These exams are likely to be less reliable than published exams Reliability and validity generally are unknown Creating effective exams requires time and skill Score exams takes time Traditional testing methods may not provide authentic measurement Norms generally are not available 	
Embedded assignments and course activities	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives Out-of-class assignments are not restricted to time constraints typical for exams Students are generally motivated to demonstrate the extent of their learning Can provide authentic assessment of learning objectives Can provide a context for assessing communication and teamwork skills, as well as other types of learning objectives Can be used for grading as well as assessment Faculty who develop the procedures are likely to be interested in results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it Data collection is unobtrusive to students 	 Requires time to develop and coordinate Requires faculty trust that the program will be assessed, not individual teachers Reliability and validity generally are unknown Norms generally are not available 	

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Competence interviews	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives The interview format allows faculty to probe for the breadth and extent of student learning Can be combined with other techniques that more effectively assess knowledge of facts and terms Can involve authentic assessment, such as simulated interactions with clients Can provide for direct assessment of some student skills, such as oral communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills 	 Requires time to develop, coordinate, schedule, and implement Interview protocols must be carefully developed Subjective judgments must be guided by agreed-upon criteria Interviewer training takes time Interviewing using unstructured interviews requires expertise Not an efficient way to assess knowledge of specific facts and terms Some students may be intimidated by the process, reducing their ability to demonstrate their learning
Portfolios	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives Students are encouraged to take responsibility for and pride in their learning Students may become more aware of their own academic growth Can be used for developmental assessment and can be integrated into the advising process to individualize student planning Can help faculty identify curriculum gaps Students can use portfolios and the portfolio process to prepare for graduate school or career applications Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it Webfolios or CD-ROMs can be easily viewed, duplicated, and stored 	 Requires faculty time to prepare the portfolio assignment and to assist students in preparing portfolios Requires faculty analysis and, if graded, faculty time to assign grades May be difficult to motivate students to take the task seriously May be more difficult for transfer students to assemble the portfolio if they haven't saved relevant materials Students may refrain from criticizing the program if their portfolios is graded or if their names will be associate with portfolios during the review It may be difficult to protect student confidentiality and privacy
Collective portfolios	 Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning Workload demands generally are more manageable than traditional portfolios Students are not required to do extra work Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it Data collection is unobtrusive to students 	 If assignments are not aligned with the objectives being examined, evidence may be problematic If sampling is not done well, results may not generalize to the entire program Reviewing the materials takes time and planning