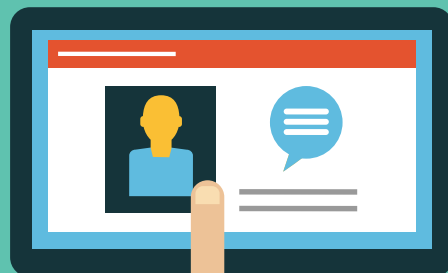# TRY
Instant
Assessment:
It's Easier than You Think!

Because college students today fully embrace technology, you can conduct assessment easily and instantly and gather useful data about your programs.

By DEL SUGGS, MSEd

Assessment is one of the most dreaded words in higher education. That's understandable, as assessing learning in the world of student activities can be daunting. It's challenging to create learning outcomes, to build an assessment tool, to administer the assessment, and then to analyze the data. That's not to mention all those surveys you must score and tabulate.

I may have created a solution for you. I call it "Instant Assessment," and it allows you to collect data from your students at the conclusion of a program or event and have it immediately available. I use this technique in all my presentations to determine the effectiveness of my programs, and you can, too.

Before we begin, please download a QR code scanner on your cell phone or tablet. You've seen those funny square boxes with the squiggly lines everywhere you go. Even if you know that they are called QR codes, there is a good chance you've never bothered to install a QR code reader on your device. Do that right now, please.

What Is Instant Assessment?

With today's college students fully embracing technology, some basic and general assessment can be done electronically. This concept of instant assessment allows students to complete your assessment tool in a very simple and immediate manner using the devices they have with them constantly: their cell phones.

When I first devised this technique, I discussed it with Dr. Gwen Dungy, Executive Director Emeritus of NASPA. "I think you have an innovative idea here," she said. "I agree that we should capture as much feedback from students as possible, and they will define the medium."

Here's how it works: first, you develop some simple, assessable learning outcomes. Then you create a simple online survey to assess those outcomes. Next, you create QR codes to allow students to easily complete your survey.

Then—when the program or event is over—you return to your office, log on to your Google account, and take a look at all the data you've collected—or, rather, that your students have assembled for you.

What Is Assessment in General?

Assessment is essentially a measurement process of the learning that has either taken place or can take place. Assessment is comprised of all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Assessment is important because it determines the effectiveness of learning. It's an important diagnostic tool that can be used to improve learning. Assessment is a valuable tool in evaluating the teaching/learning process on campus—both in academic affairs and in student affairs. It's also important because your boss expects you to do it.

It's particularly challenging, though, because many student affairs professionals come to the field from other disciplines. Because these individuals don't have an academic background in student affairs, they often don't have the training to do assessment (Seagraves & Dean, 2010).

Begin with Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes define what is to be learned. They establish conditions for success and the means of determining that learning has occurred. Learning outcomes express the specific goals of learning experiences. They state what a student should be able to know, do or value as a result of engaging in that learning experience.

Learning outcomes are specific to a particular event or program. You should create learning outcomes that reflect the learning that will occur at the program, but also include the overall mission of your institution as embraced in the CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) or *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA).

Here is a very simple technique for developing learning outcomes.

The ABC's of Learning Outcomes
- **A**udience: the students
- **B**ehavior: what they should learn
- **C**ondition: the teaching event
- **D**egree of Achievement: the amount of learning that is expected
  (R. Heinich, M. Molenda, J. Russell, S. Smaldino, 2002).

Developing Learning Outcomes

Follow this formula: Condition, Audience, Behavior and (sometimes) Degree.

Here is an example without Degree:
(Condition) "After attending the leadership conference," (Audience) "students" (Behavior) "will identify servant leadership behaviors."

Here is an example with Degree:
(Condition) "After viewing the film *Snow White*," (Audience) "the audience" (Behavior) "will be able to name" (Degree) "at least five of the seven dwarfs."

This ABC and sometimes D method will enable you to create straightforward and easily assessable learning outcomes. Just remember to keep your outcomes simple and assessable, though. With instant assessment, students can't write an essay or explain a complex concept. They can, however, perform actions like "list" or "identify" or answer true/false and multiple-choice questions. That should allow you to achieve some basic assessment about the effectiveness of your programs.

As a starting point, I would suggest you create three to five learning outcomes for the program or event you want to assess. These learning outcomes should reflect the learning you actually expect to take place at the specific program or event.

Create Your Assessment Tool

While Survey Monkey, Survey Console, and Zoomerang may be the most familiar names in online surveys, there is another source you should consider: Google. You can create your own survey in Google Drive (formerly called Google Docs) with beautiful graphics and all the form elements you will need, while at the same time being able to export all answers into

Excel or get great graphs of the responses, all for free.

Here is the step-by-step process:

Create a Google account. If you have a Gmail account or an Android phone, you already have a Google account. If not, I'd suggest you create a Gmail account—you may find it useful for your personal email. You can use that to access all the different services that Google offers.

Log into Google. When you go to the Google homepage, the login is at the top right side.

Click on "Drive" on the top menu bar. Look on the left side. There is a red box that reads "create." When you click on that, it opens a drop-down menu. Click on "Form."

At this point, you can begin to create your survey. At the top, enter the name of the survey and any instructions or clarifications. Don't worry: you can always edit or enter this later if you want.

One sample question is automatically created for your form, which you can edit as desired. You can change the question type to be text, paragraph text, multiple choice, or checkboxes, or choose from a list, scale or grid.

Click "Add Item" in the lower left corner to add more questions. Notice that you can make questions "required" by clicking the checkbox at the bottom of the question editing area. After you have finished editing a question, you click "done." You can edit it again by clicking the pencil icon on the right side of it. The second icon will duplicate the question, and the trash can will delete it. You can also click and drag to reorder your questions as desired.

Create questions that will assess the learning outcomes you've created for your event. Remember that you need clear and straightforward responses to your questions. Don't try to make this instant assessment tool too complex.

Customize with a theme. This step is optional, but Google Forms allows you to select different themes to make your surveys look more visually interesting and polished. There are many different designs, and you can change them at any time. Just click the "Change theme" button on the top menu bar.

Personalize your form. After respondents submit your survey they will be shown a webpage that reads, "Thanks! Your response will now appear in my spreadsheet." You can customize this message if desired. You also can also choose to publish a response summary for respondents to see after they submit their own answers.

Share your survey. At the top right of your Google Form editing window is a menu button that reads, "Send form." Click on this to open a window with a link to your "live" public form. This is the link you want to click and copy so you can share it with the students who will respond to your survey. This is the link to your assessment, but it's unwieldy. Let's make it even easier for your students to complete by creating a QR code.

Use QR Codes

The next step is to create QR codes so your student respondents can complete the assessment tool on their smartphones. QR stands for Quick Response, just what you want for instant assessment.

QR codes were originally created by Toyota to keep track of parts. QR codes are very simple two-dimensional bar codes. What makes them so useful is they can still be read if much of the code is unreadable. Some QR codes can be understood by bar code readers with as little as 60% of the code intact.

The most popular use of QR codes is to direct the user to a website. That's what you'll do here—direct your students to your online survey. But you should know that QR codes can perform many actions, from sending a text message to downloading an address card to calling a phone number and more.

Start by shortening the huge URL you will get for your survey. There are lots of URL shorteners—TinyURL, bit.ly or goo.gl and more. I recommend using goo.gl. If you hadn't guessed, it's the URL shortener from Google. Copy and paste the long URL that links to your survey. Shorten the link with goo.gl, then click on "details" by the shortened link. It will present you with a QR code that you can also use to share the survey. Just copy it and paste it wherever you need to do so.

Make sure you are logged into your Google account when you shorten URLs and goo.gl will also show you statistics on how many people have accessed your survey via the shortened link. That's handy to see how many people are accessing your survey.

Test your QR code. This is very important. Take your own smartphone and use your bar code reader to scan your new QR code. Did it take you to your survey? If not, you need to double check your shortened URL and make sure the link to your survey is correct.

Drive Students to Your Survey

You'll know the next step. You've got to get students to scan your QR code at the event in order to complete the assessment. In order to scan your QR code, they need a scanner app on their phone or tablet. Ask, encourage and beg them to download the app right there on site. Remember that I began by asking you to install the app. You have to get your students to do that, too. It's typically not a problem, as many students have always wondered about those funny code things, anyway. You'll likely find they are happy to install and use the app.

Print and post your QR code at your event. If you have a program or flier, make sure the code is on it. Print poster-sized codes and place them around the event. Or do what I do: create a PowerPoint slide and project it on the screen.

Consider Motivation

Add incentives to encourage your students to scan your code and complete your assessment. Students don't generally have a reason to help you assess their learning. But, have you ever called or gone online to complete a survey from a purchase receipt? Businesses as different as Home Depot and Taco Bell all use this technique to get their customers to respond.

What would get your students to respond? Would it be a promised a gift card for one lucky respondent chosen at random? You know your students better than anyone else. Maybe you could offer a free package of Ramen noodles to everyone who completes the survey.

You could also provide other types of prizes, such as free or early admission to an upcoming special event or program. Or how about giving away some of those CDs you brought back from a programming conference?

Google Drive lists each response with a timestamp. If you want to track who is completing your assessment, you'll have to come up with your own method. You could always request their email address in order to make them eligible for a prize or drawing.

You can also request other demographic data if you think it might be useful, such as gender, class, major, and more.

Check Your Results

After students have completed your assessment tool, it's time to review your data. Your survey results can be viewed several ways. Data from your form goes directly into a Google Spreadsheet, which can be viewed online or downloaded as an Excel or other file type.

Open your Google Drive website and log in. You will see a file directory with your survey. Next to it will be file with the same name that also says "(Responses)." Click on that file.

That click will open a new window with a spreadsheet of the responses. There are your responses, and you can download them as an "xls," a "csv" or a "pdf" file. When you've saved the downloaded file, you can open it in your favorite spreadsheet formula and begin to analyze it. You love doing your own statistical analysis, right? If not, then try this: Select "Form" from the menu bar, and then click "Show summary of responses." This will open a beautiful page with pie charts and percentages of the responses. Google will do the statistical analysis and generate charts and graphs for you.

You can change your survey and questions at any time, but you shouldn't move the questions around after people have started submitting answers or the order of your spreadsheet columns can get confusing.

Unlike many commercial form and survey options, Google does not have a maximum number of respondents. And the price is right—it's free. Give Google Drive a try and challenge your staff and students to use surveys to collect and analyze data about your programs.

Try Instant Assessment

With this simple system, it's a small matter to assess student learning outcomes at your programs and events. There's no reason to wait until the reaccreditation process begins. Start now by developing your learning outcomes and assessment tools, and compile your data. I think you will find "Instant Assessment" to be a powerful tool to measure the learning at your activities and events.

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or tablet and complete the assessment of this article.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Del Suggs is a musician, speaker and author who has been a member of NACA since 1980, having served on its Board of Directors (1995-97), its National Convention Program Committee (1997-98), it's Strategic Planning Committee (1996-97) and on the former Associate Member Advisory Council (1993-97). He received the former NACA® Southeast Region's Outstanding Associate Member Award (1991) and the NACA® South's Best Educational Session Award (2007). He has also been inducted into the National Campus Entertainment Hall of Fame (2001). The Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities named him Best Solo Artist (2002) and Best Campus Speaker (2010). He has written a number of articles for *Campus Activities Programming®* over the years and is the author of *Truly Leading: Lessons in Leadership* (2001, now in its sixth printing) and is a co-author of *Roadmap to Success* (2011) along with Dr. Deepak Chopra, Dr. Ken Blanchard and others.