# A Toolkit of Assessment Methods:
Multiple Approaches for Collecting Meaningful Data

Nathan Lindsay, Ph.D.

West Texas A&M University
September 13, 2019

Our department consistently has the data it needs to "tell a compelling story" of how we are contributing to student success.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Not applicable

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree ...	Disagree	Strongly disag...	Not applicable
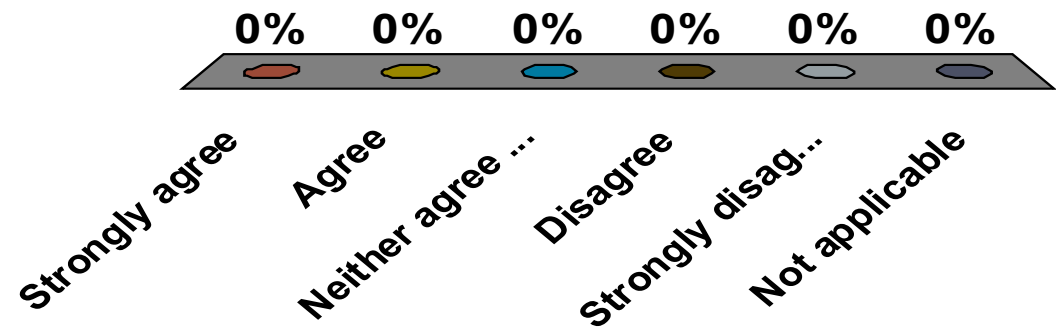
What are the benefits of assessment?

- Making a difference, and measuring that difference

- Improvement of services and programs

- Documentation of student learning

- Demonstration of the value/outcomes of certain offerings

- Support for more funding

- Preparation for accreditation

Assessment Competencies

ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners:
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)

The AER area "focuses on the ability to use, design, conduct, and critique qualitative and quantitative AER analyses; to manage organizations using AER processes and the results obtained from them; and to shape the political and ethical climate surrounding AER processes and uses on campus." (p. 8)

See:
http://www.naspa.org/regions/regioniii/Professional%20Competency.pdf

Assessment Competencies (cont.)

One should be able to:

Basic: differentiate among assessment, program review, evaluation, planning, and research and the methodologies appropriate to each.

Intermediate: design ongoing and periodic data collection efforts such that they are sustainable, rigorous, as unobtrusive as possible, and technologically current.

Advanced: effectively lead the conceptualization and design of ongoing, systematic, high quality, data-based strategies at the institutional, divisional, and/or unit-wide level to evaluate and assess learning, programs, services, and personnel. (pp. 8-9)

Competencies (cont.)

ACPA's Assessment Skills & Knowledge (ASK) Standards:

- Assessment Design
- Articulating Learning & Development Outcomes
- Selection of Data Collection & Management Methods
- Assessment Instruments
- Surveys Used for Assessment Purposes
- Interviews & Focus Groups

- Assessment Methods: Analysis
- Benchmarking
- Program Review & Evaluation
- Assessment Ethics
- Effective Reporting & Use of Results
- Politics of Assessment
- Assessment Education

http://www.acpa.nche.edu/ask-standards-booklet

Levels of Student Affairs Assessment

- Tracking participation/usage

- Satisfaction

- Needs Assessment

- Benchmarking

- Learning Outcomes

Assessment Methods (Schuh, 2009)

- Survey
- Focus Group/ Interview
- Observation
- Pre-/Post Tests
- Rubrics
- Portfolios
- Case Studies

- Reflective Journals
- One-Minute Paper
- Tracking Services
- Trends
- Cost/Benefit Analysis
- Document Review

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

"Closing the Loop" in Assessment

1. Identify outcomes

2. Gather evidence

3. Interpret evidence

4. Implement change

5. Gather evidence again
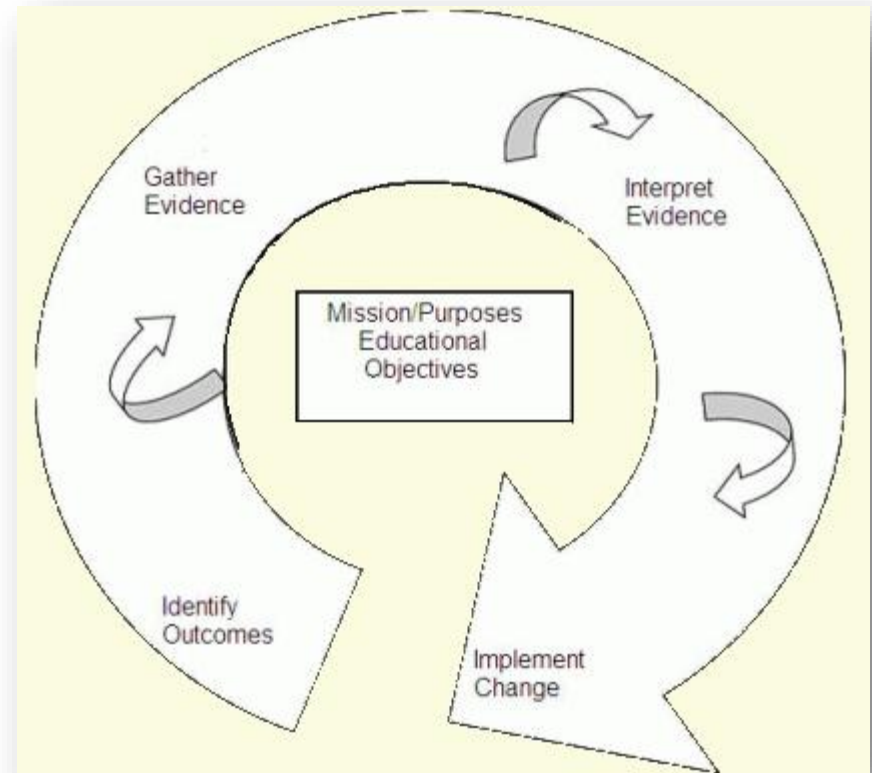
The Assessment Cycle
*(Adapted from* Bresicani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004)

SWOT Analysis of Assessment

SWOT Analysis Chart

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective
Internal origin (attributes of the organization)	Strengths	Weaknesses
External origin (attributes of the environment)	Opportunities	Threats

- Provides a forum for staff to voice their concerns.
- Provides potential solutions for challenges and a roadmap for future assessment initiatives.

Tracking Numbers: Data on Students' Use of Service Areas (UNCW)
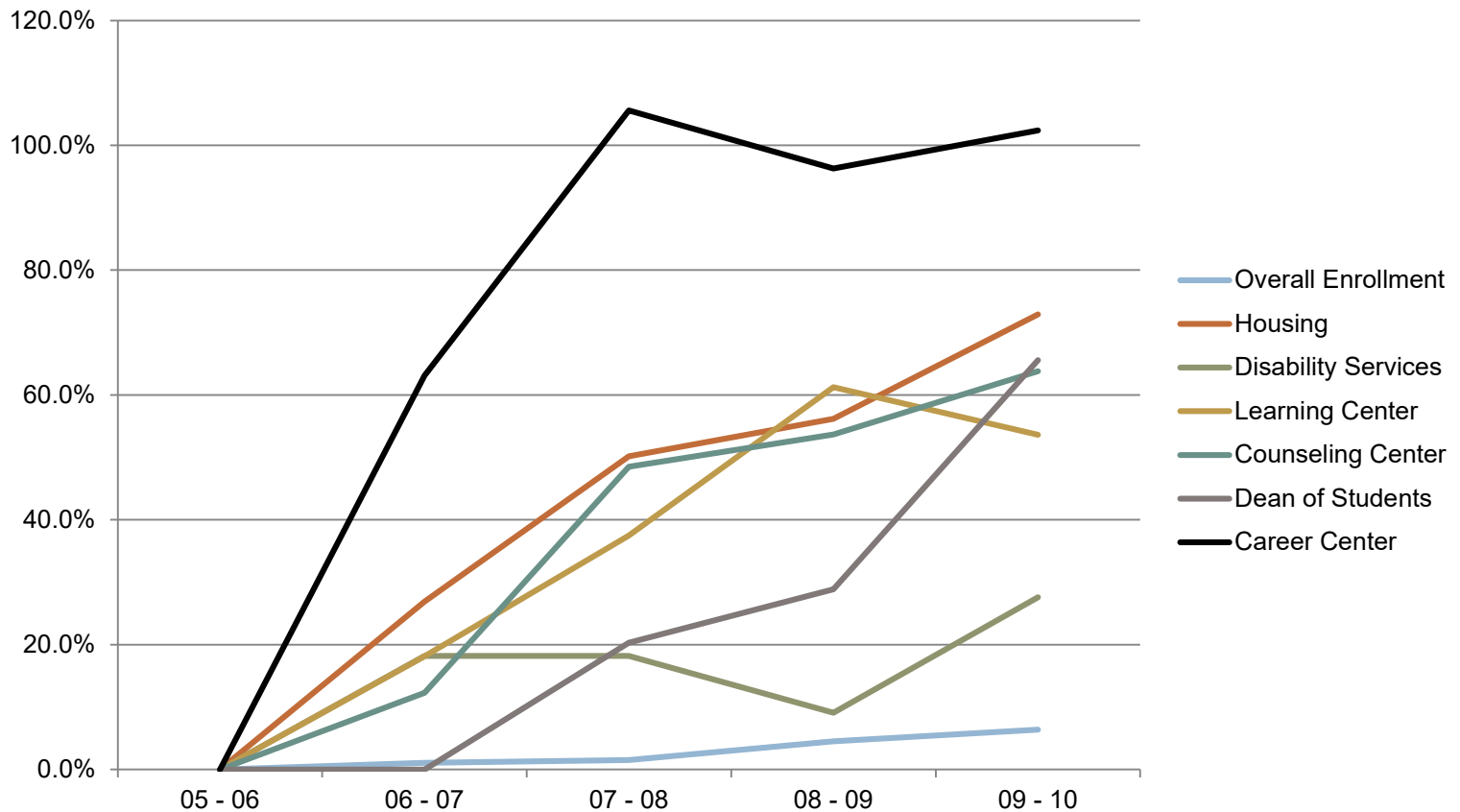
Can dogs talk?

What are Learning Outcomes?

Learning outcomes are what *students* are expected to *demonstrate* in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes upon <u>completion</u> of a program, course, or activity.

** To change the culture, focus on learning!!**

1. How can we help our students learn?
2. What is best for our students?

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs

Learning outcomes are the knowledge, skills, and values we want our students to have:

- Personal Responsibility

- Communication Skills

- Technology and Information Literacy

- Culture and Diversity

- Civic and Community Engagement

Personal Responsibility

- Students will be able to identify a challenge, formulate solutions, and select an appropriate outcome that meets their needs or resolves a conflict
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the code of conduct
- Students will be able to recognize the effects of their behavior on oneself, on others, and on the community
- Students will be able to set life goals and identify and use specific campus and community resources to articulate the steps needed to reach these goals
- Students can identify methods and resources to maintain their fiscal wellness

Personal Responsibility (cont.)

- Students can use their core values to guide decision making when faced with moral, ethical, or other dilemmas

- Students demonstrate leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Students demonstrate their ability to integrate concepts of honesty and integrity into self-understanding and interactions with others

- Students will be able to set life goals and identify and use specific campus and community resources to articulate the steps needed to reach these goals

- Students can identify and use appropriate resources for self-advocacy and problem solving

Ways to Measure Personal Responsibility

- Report out data from case management

- For students in violation of the code of conduct:
  - Assess their ability to recognize significant standards or principles
  - Assess participation and impact

- Evaluate data from exit interviews and offices that provide professional development services

- Assess student organizations that are founded on core values

UNCW Learning Outcomes Survey: Personal Responsibility

- 1,122 UNCW students participated
  - Random sample stratified by class year, gender, and race/ethnicity

- Administered online by Campus Labs

- Purpose of the survey:
  - To assess how participation in student affairs programs and events was related to students' development of <u>personal responsibility</u>.

Study Research Questions

1) How did the overall sample of UNCW students score on the items measuring personal responsibility?

2) How did participation in student affairs activities predict students' responses on these items?

The survey had many Likert scale agreement questions, along with a few open-ended questions
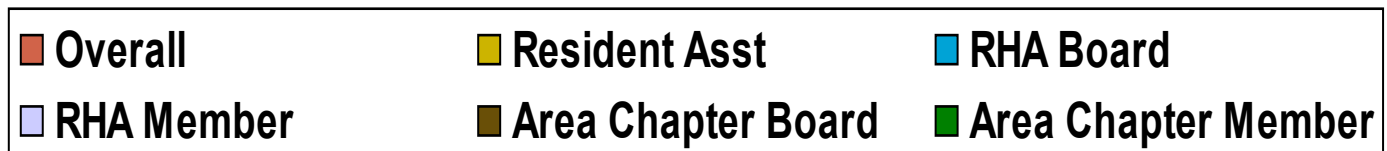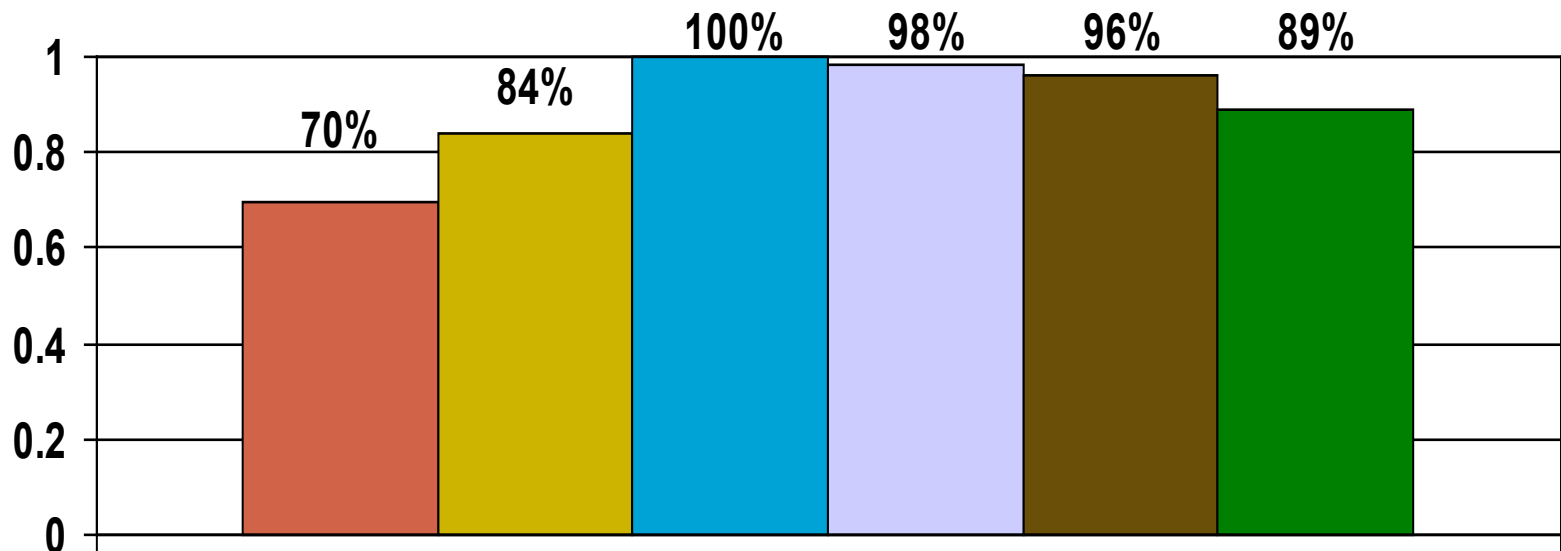
Learning Outcomes Results

- As a result of their experiences at UNCW,

    - 86.8% of students agreed that they have a better understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses.

    - 83.5% of students agreed that they are better aware of how their current actions and behaviors impact their future career opportunities.

The Benefits of Involvement Example #1: Housing & Residence Life

- **"As a result of my experiences at UNCW, I better understand the impact of my behavior on others."**
  - In response to the above question, the percentages of students who agreed were as follows:

Bar chart values:
- Overall: 70%
- Resident Asst: 84%
- RHA Board: 100%
- RHA Member: 98%
- Area Chapter Board: 96%
- Area Chapter Member: 89%

Legend:
- Overall
- Resident Asst
- RHA Board
- RHA Member
- Area Chapter Board
- Area Chapter Member

Questions:

1. What are a few of the skills, knowledge, and values you want your students to acquire?

2. What are a few ways in which these "learning outcomes" could be assessed in your department?

3. What a few ways that "student success" could be assessed in your department?

Needs Assessments and Direct Assessments

What is Needs Assessment?

- "Assessing student needs is the process of determining the presence or absence of the factors and conditions, resources, services, and learning opportunities that students need in order to meet their educational goals and objectives within the context of an institution's mission" (Upcraft & Schuh, 2001, p. 131)

- It is important to delineate needs from wants, and to distinguish between national trends and local needs

Common Mistakes in Needs Assessments

- Only using one method

- Only listening to the majority population

- Only studying the users of a service/program

- Using needs assessment for a decision that was already made

- Lack of coordination

(Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)

Commuter/Non Traditional Student Survey Overview

- **<u>Purpose:</u>** To assess the needs and satisfaction levels of UNCW students related to a wide variety of commuter services.

- Collaboratively designed between Office of the Dean of Students and the Office of Student Life Assessment

- 232 randomly sampled UNCW students completed online survey administered by Student Voice

Commuter Recommendations

1. Provide more information about commuter services (i.e., by using email announcements, flyers, and Facebook more effectively).

2. Provide opportunities that will allow non-traditional students, student veterans, and graduate students to connect with others from the campus community (e.g., through a lounge space).

3. Allow for online email and workspace access.

4. Community Development Assistants should work harder to make themselves known to the residents in the community, and also to make certain the events they have coordinated are well-publicized.

Direct Assessments

- Indirect assessments often provide a snapshot of students' perspectives on various programs (e.g., through a survey)
- Direct assessments, however, are a means by which students can demonstrate the knowledge they have obtained (e.g., through a quiz)
  - For example, indirect assessments might ask students whether they think they learned certain principles at a workshop, whereas a direct assessment would test them on these principles.

Direct Assessment: Housing and Residence Life

- The Residence Life staff used a series of direct learning outcome assessments (i.e., quizzes) to gauge learning on a variety of training topics including:
  - Crisis response, programming knowledge, diversity education, and student conduct procedures.

- RAs were given a 20 question test—four separate times—before, during, and after their training.

- The object of providing multiple post-tests was to gauge the RA's retention of vital knowledge surrounding the training topics throughout the year.

Direct Assessment: Housing and Residence Life Results

- RA's from various staffs were scoring low from the beginning of the year to end of the year on a consistent group of questions

- Returning staff members scored significantly higher on the pre-test (+12.6 on average), but the average difference on all post-tests was very similar between the two groups.

Direct Assessment:
Housing and Residence Life Action Steps

- Outcomes from the direct assessment:
  - The Residence Life staff used this information to redesign and strengthen Resident Assistant training by:
    - Focusing on improving individual training sessions, and providing feedback to returning presenters
    - Creating more consistent messages between full departmental training sessions and individual staff training sessions
    - Choosing better methods of instruction in some areas of training.

Questions:

How could needs assessments be used in your department?

How could direct assessments be used in your department?

Mixed Methods Assessments

Mixed Methods: Surveys and Focus Groups

- **Why Mixed Methods?**

  - **Drill Down**
    - Survey =What are the issues/numbers?
    - Focus Group (Group Interview) = Why are they issues?

  - **Validity of Reports (You've gone the extra mile)**

  - **Students feel that their voice is heard**

Flash Lights vs. Floodlights

- **The Floodlight = Large Survey (e.g., EBI Benchmarking Survey)**
  - What? Broad issues; not as much depth in exploration

- **The Flashlight = Focus Groups**
  - Why? Focused, detailed look; more depth in exploration
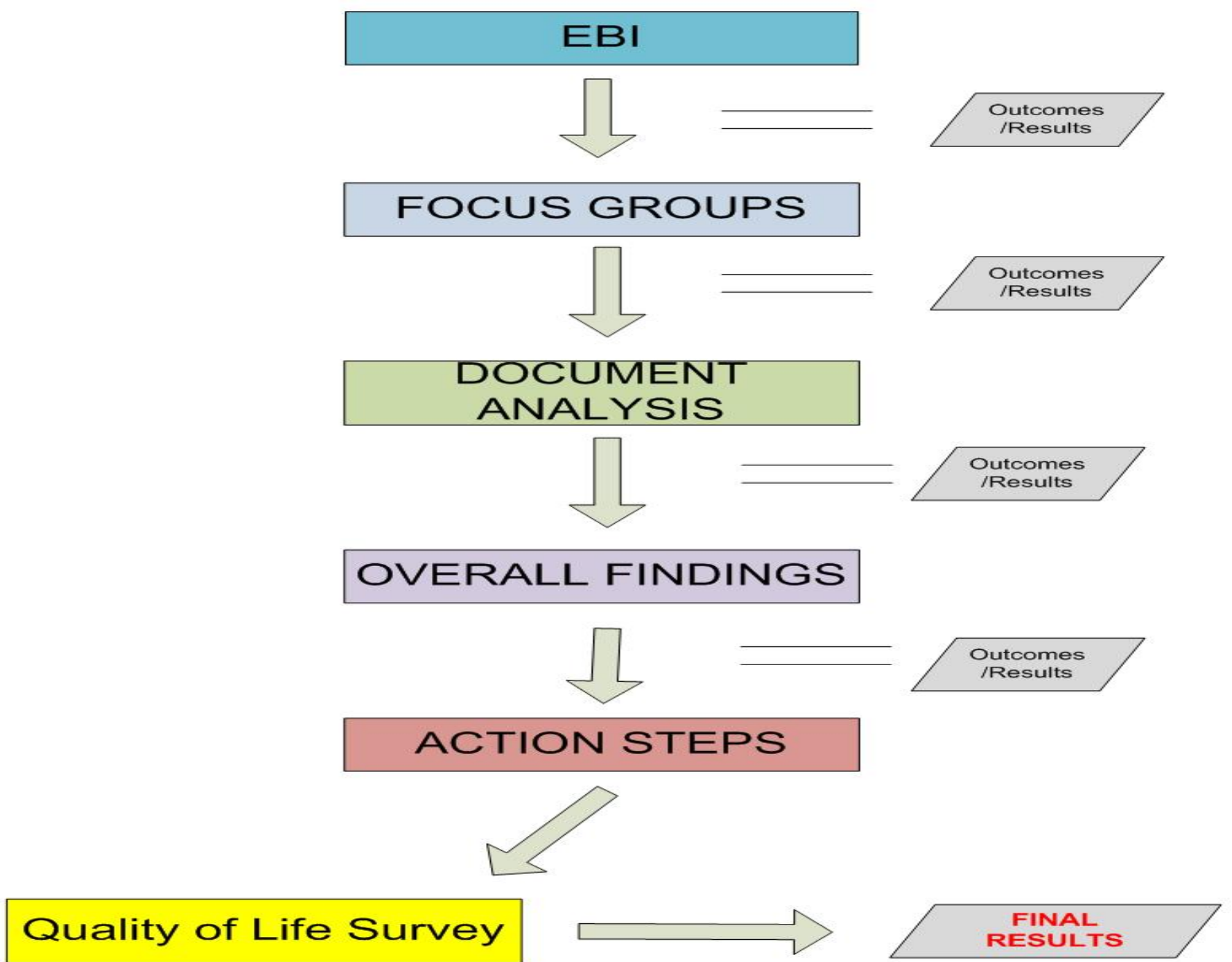
Question:

How could mixed method assessments be used in your department?

Sharing Data and Action Steps with Students:
"We've Heard Your Voice"

We've Heard Your Voice

- Initiative developed by the Office of Student Life Assessment, based on similar program in student affairs at the University of Georgia.
- Communicates assessment findings back to the student body and other constituents.
- Emphasis is placed on demonstrating improvements made due to:
  - response to surveys
  - focus groups
  - other feedback

Distribution of Media

- Each department in the Division of Student Affairs was included in this initiative, which was made possible through strong support and encouragement from the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs
- Each area was asked to develop 5-10 talking points
- Assessment outcomes were publicized via:
    - The school newspaper
    - The school's parent newsletter
    - Fliers posted around campus
    - Email
    - On-campus Television ads

Quotes from Students

- "Some of the things which have changed, I just took for granted, I didn't know there was any other way. I think that when you tell people what has changed, they will see that they're helping the future generations of UNCW, and making the University better as a whole."

- "When you take into account things like the national government, you have a lot of people who would say "I don't vote because my vote doesn't count". It was so cool to see—hey, the things that I'm saying are making a difference. It's great when people see that when I take my time to do this, changes really do happen."

Question:

How could assessment findings and action steps be shared with students in your department?

Contact Information

Nathan K. Lindsay, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Associate Professor, Educational Leadership
University of Montana
nathan.lindsay@umontana.edu