



**Focus Groups, Surveys,  
and Rubrics, Oh My!**

## **Choosing an Assessment Method**

Office of the Vice President for Student Life  
The University of Iowa

# Outline

- Review steps to assessing student learning
- Describe considerations in choosing an assessment method
- Describe 3 assessment methods:
  - Rubrics
  - Surveys
  - Focus Groups
- Discuss specific methods you might choose, based on your outcome(s)
- Questions
- Assessment



# At the end of the session, you will be able to...

- Identify at least 1 opportunity for *embedded* assessment in your workplace
- Define direct and indirect measures of learning
- List at least 2 strengths for each assessment method discussed in the workshop
- Describe at least 1 thing you learned about each assessment method discussed in the workshop

# Steps to assessing student learning

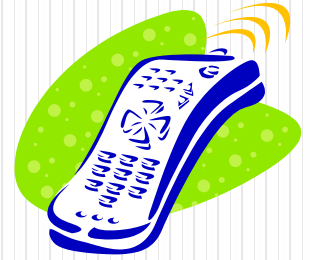
- Identify learning outcomes (goals describing what students should know, think, or be able to do as a result of an experience)
- Provide the opportunity for students to gain learning outcomes
- Gather, analyze, and interpret evidence to determine whether or not learning occurred
- Use evidence to improve student learning



*The gathering component is the focus of today's workshop*

Suskie (2009)

# Which of the following is an *indirect* measure of learning?



1. A survey asking students to list at least 3 conflict resolution strategies
2. A survey question that asks students to rate their level of confidence in their ability to resolve conflict on a scale from 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident)
3. A rubric rating how well a resident assistant applied strategies for resolving conflict in a role play during training
4. A focus group in which resident assistants discuss the following question: what did you learn from the workshop on conflict resolution?

# Data can be...

- **Qualitative or quantitative**
  - Qualitative data describe things in terms of categorizations or qualities (e.g., gender)
  - Quantitative data can be counted or expressed numerically (e.g., age)
- **Direct or indirect** measures of learning
  - Direct measures require students to *display* learning
  - Indirect measures ask students or others to *reflect* on student learning (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004)

# Considerations in choosing a method

- Think about *how* you'll need to use the information
  - What types of information will be useful in helping you know what you need to change?
- Think about *who* will use the assessment information
  - What kind(s) of data to they respond to?



## Another way to look at it....

- There are **naturally occurring assessment methods** (e.g., things that *are or can be embedded* within a program or experience such as reflection papers, essays, portfolios, role plays, observed behaviors, student interactions)
- There are methods **designed** solely as a means to evaluate



- The BEST assessment method is the one that gives you useful and useable data.
- If you have a great survey, but no one completes it, what do you have?

## Strike while the iron is hot...

- Give strong consideration to capturing assessment data *at the time*
- Once they leave...

# There are many assessment tools to choose from, including:

- Rubrics
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Observations
- Document analysis
- Portfolios



*We will focus on  
these 3 today*

# What do you *really* mean?

## Consider your criteria

- Example learning outcome: *Students will be able to demonstrate excellent oral communication when presenting their agendas to the student senate*
- Example criteria:
  - Speaks in a clear voice
  - Uses culturally appropriate eye contact
  - Is dressed appropriately
  - Maintains appropriate posture
  - Is well organized
  - Uses appropriate and meaningful visual aids

*Criteria help us know when a learning outcome has been met by describing what meeting that outcome entails or looks like.*

# Rubrics

# What are rubrics?

- A detailed set of criteria for defining the standards for evaluating performance
- Are criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced (i.e., *collaborative* learning, not *competitive* learning)
- Can vary in complexity from simple checklists to detailed components with detailed scales
- May use existing rubrics, or develop a rubric based on discipline or best-practice standards

# Example rubric design – checklist

**Students will be able to demonstrate excellent oral communication when presenting their agendas to the student senate.**

Speaks in a clear voice Y

Uses culturally appropriate eye contact Y

Is dressed appropriately N

Maintains appropriate posture Y

Is well organized Y

Uses appropriate and meaningful visual aids Y

Pays attention to the length of allotted time N

Etc.

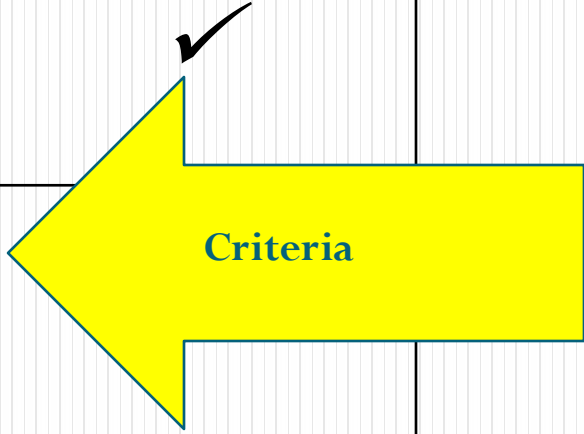



**Rubrics can be very helpful if shared with students to “pull back the curtain” and expose what we want them to learn**



# Example rubric design – levels of performance

**Post-Event Debrief Conversation with Student Organization Advisor for outcome on sustaining collaborative relationships within Riverfest:**

	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
Exec. Team focuses on bettering collaborative partnerships			
Non-blaming language used throughout event implementation			
Committee members took responsibility for remedying problems		✓	

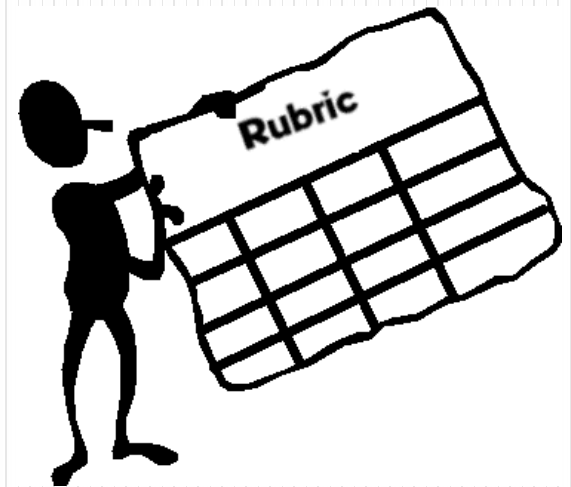
# Example rubric design – levels of performance + descriptions

Students will be able to articulate central aspects of creating a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
Importance of physical activity	<i>Thinks being “active” is sending text messages</i>	<i>Can state basic physical activity guidelines</i>	<i>Can outline an effective physical activity plan based on personal needs</i>
Includes nutrition as a foundation	<i>Thinks Red Bull is a food group</i>	<i>Can describe the basic components of MyPyramid</i>	<i>Can identify better and best ways to meet nutrition guidelines</i>
Criteria C	<i>Description</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Description</i>

# 7 steps to rubric development

- 1) Identify the outcome you are assessing
- 2) Articulate what meeting that outcome *looks like*
- 3) Identify how you will gather the information (e.g., reflective writing, observation)
- 4) Choose type of rubric
- 5) List the criteria (rows)
- 6) List levels of achievement (columns)
- 7) Pilot and revise as needed



# Surveys

# Tips for dealing with survey fatigue

- Perks
- Contacts
- Convenience
- Ask only the essential
- Follow up



# Tips for writing survey questions

- Avoid jargon – keep it simple
- Avoid asking things that respondents will have a difficult time recalling
- Distinguish between undecided and neutral (but be prepared...)
- Ensure that response categories are mutually exclusive
- Avoid double-barreled questions (i.e., 2 questions in 1)
- Pilot your questions with students

Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson (2004); Dillman (2007)

# Writing survey questions to get at learning (direct measures)

- General statements that learning has occurred (measuring student perception of learning)
  - *As a result of participating in MAC, I understand how to use the group intervention technique in a bystander situation.*
- Demonstration of specific learning
  - *List one example of how you could use the “group intervention technique” with the following scenario (included).*

# Writing survey questions to get at learning (direct measures)

- General statements that learning has occurred (measuring student perception of learning)
  - *As a result of meeting with the health educator, I have an understanding of my barriers to behavior change.*
- Demonstration of specific learning
  - *List two barriers to behavior change you identified during your meeting with the health educator.*



# Writing survey questions to get at learning (direct measures)

- General statements that learning has occurred (measuring student perception of learning)
  - *As a result of participating in this workshop, I will be able to use assertive behaviors in communicating with my roommate.*
- Demonstration of specific learning
  - *Evaluator in this case is an RA who observes the student's behavior on the floor. Using a rubric, the RA assesses the level of the student response.*

# National surveys – overwhelmed with data?

- Identify why you want to use them before ever taking a next step
- Recognize you will never use all the information, so it's best to identify specific items you will track and use beforehand (it's ok not to use it all!)
- Extensive data can be overwhelming – use what you previously identified, rather than worrying about all of it
- If you can't connect the survey to specific outcomes, or guarantee that you'll use the data, pass.



# Focus Groups

# Myths about focus groups

- They are low-cost and quick
- They require professional moderators
- They require special facilities
- They must consist of strangers
- They will not work for sensitive topics

Morgan (1998)



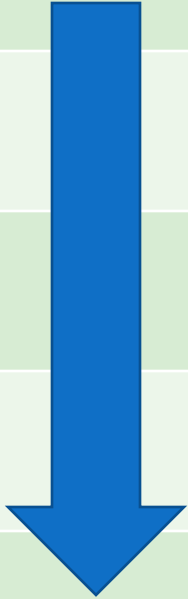
# Tips for recruiting for focus groups

- May benefit from nonrandom sampling (see handout)
- Emphasize that the focus group will be interesting and worthwhile
- Make the contacts personal
- Build on existing relationships
- If possible, offer incentives
- Make participation as convenient as possible
- Typical group size is 6 to 10
- Follow up
  - 2 weeks before – make initial contact
  - 1 week before – send a confirmation
  - Day before – send a reminder

Morgan (1998)

# Flow of focus group questions

Question Category	Purpose
Opening	To get participants acquainted and feeling connected
Introductory	To introduce the topic of discussion
Transition	To facilitate the transition to key questions
Key	To obtain insight on areas of central concern
Ending	To bring closure to the discussion



Krueger (1998)

# Tips for writing focus group questions

- **Assume nothing**
  - Why do you like being a major in this department?
  - Improved: Do you like being a major in this department? (then, a follow-up)
- **Be neutral**
  - Do long wait times for appointments discourage you from going to your academic advisor?
  - Improved: What has been your experience in making appointments with your academic advisor?

# Tips for writing focus group questions

- **Ask one question at a time**
  - How is the library collection in your major? Do you have trouble finding source materials?
  - Improved: What has been your experience in finding resource materials at the library?
- **Avoid slang**
  - How do you like using the CL?
  - Improved: Please tell me about using the department's computer lab.

Schuh (n.d.)



# Tips for conducting focus groups

- Record the discussion
- Speak clearly
- Use a conversational manner
- Show interest
- Control your reactions
- Be flexible, but stay on track
- Be comfortable with silence
- Probe/clarify as needed
- Take notes
- Divide responsibilities



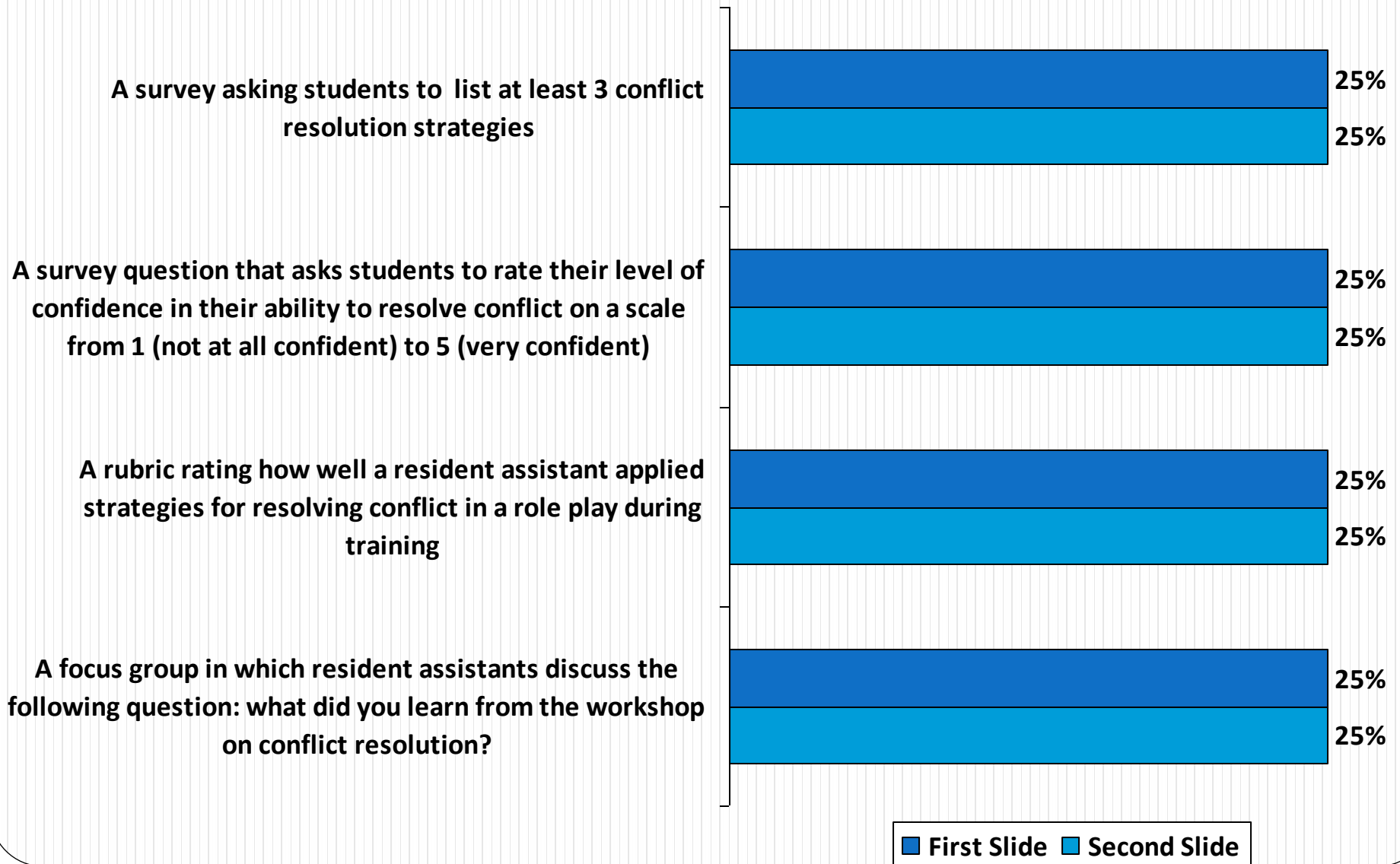
Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson (2004); Krueger (1998)

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4. A focus group in which resident assistants discuss the following question: what did you learn from the workshop on conflict resolution?

# Which of the following is an indirect measure of learning?



# Questions?

