Evaluation of Education Development Projects

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Caution

The information in these slides represents the opinions of the individual program offices and not an official NSF position.
Framework for the Session

- Learning situations involve prior knowledge
  - Some knowledge correct
  - Some knowledge incorrect (i.e., misconceptions)
- Learning is
  - Connecting new knowledge to prior knowledge
  - Correcting misconception
- Learning requires
  - Recalling prior knowledge – actively
  - Altering prior knowledge
Active-Cooperative Learning

• Learning activities must encourage learners to:
  – Recall prior knowledge -- actively, explicitly
  – Connect new concepts to existing ones
  – Challenge and alter misconceptions
• The think-share-report-learn (TSRL) process addresses these steps
Session Format

• “Working” session
  – Short presentations (mini-lectures)
  – Group exercise
    • Exercise Format
      – Think → Share → Report → Learn (TSRL)

• Limited Time – May feel rushed
  – Intend to identify issues & suggest ideas
    • Get you started
    • No closure -- No “answers” – No “formulas”
Group Behavior

• Be positive, supportive, and cooperative
  – Limit critical or negative comments

• Be brief and concise
  – No lengthy comments

• Stay focused
  – Stay on the subject

• Take turns as recorder
  – Report the group’s ideas
Session Goals

The session will enable you to collaborate with evaluation experts in preparing effective project evaluation plans.
Session Outcomes

After the session, participants should be able to:

• Discuss the importance of **goals, outcomes, and questions** in evaluation process
  – Cognitive, affective, and achievement outcomes

• Describe several types of **evaluation tools**
  – Advantages, limitations, and appropriateness

• Discuss **data interpretation** issues
  – Variability, alternate explanations

• Develop an **evaluation plan** with an evaluator
  – Outline a first draft of an evaluation plan
Part I

Evaluation and Project Goals/Outcomes/Questions
Evaluation and Assessment

• Evaluation (assessment) has various interpretations
  – Individual’s performance (grading)
  – Program’s effectiveness (ABET accreditation)
  – Project’s progress or success (monitoring and validating)

• Session addresses project evaluation
  – May involve evaluating individual and group performance – but in the context of the project

• Project evaluation
  – Formative – monitoring progress
  – Summative – characterizing final accomplishments
Evaluation and Project Goals/Outcomes

- Evaluation starts with carefully defined project goals/outcomes
- Goals/outcomes related to:
  - Project activities
    - Initiating or completing an activity
    - Finishing a “product”
  - Student behavior
    - Modifying a learning outcome
    - Modifying an attitude or a perception
Developing Goals & Outcomes

• Start with one or more overarching statements of project intention
  – Each statement is a goal

• Convert each goal into one or more specific expected measurable results
  – Each result is an outcome
Goals – Objectives – Outcomes -- Questions

• Converting goals to outcomes may involve intermediate steps
  – Intermediate steps frequently called *objectives*
    • More specific, more measurable than goals
    • Less specific, less measurable than outcomes

• Outcomes (goals) lead to *questions*
  – These form the basis of the evaluation
  – Evaluation process *collects and interprets* data to answer evaluation questions
Definition of Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

**Goal** – Broad, overarching statement of intention or ambition
   – A goal typically leads to several objectives

**Objective** – Specific statement of intention
   – More focused and specific than goal
   – A objective may lead to one or more outcomes

**Outcome** – Statement of expected result
   – Measurable with criteria for success

*NOTE: No consistent definition of these terms*
**Goal** – Broad, overarching statement of intention or ambition

- Goals may focus on
  - Cognitive behavior
  - Affective behavior
  - Success rates
  - Diversity
- Cognitive, affective or success in targeted subgroups
Exercise #1: Identification of Goals/Outcomes

• Read the abstract
  – Note - Goal statement removed

• Suggest two plausible goals
  – One focused on a change in learning
  – One focused on a change in some other aspect of student behavior
Abstract

The goal of the project is ...... The project is developing computer-based instructional modules for statics and mechanics of materials. The project uses 3D rendering and animation software, in which the user manipulates virtual 3D objects in much the same manner as they would physical objects. Tools being developed enable instructors to realistically include external forces and internal reactions on 3D objects as topics are being explained during lectures. Exercises are being developed for students to be able to communicate with peers and instructors through real-time voice and text interactions. The project is being evaluated by ... The project is being disseminated through ... The broader impacts of the project are ...
PD’s Response – Goals on Cognitive Behavior

**GOAL**: To improve understanding of

- Concepts & application in course
  - Solve textbook problems
  - Draw free-body diagrams for textbook problems
  - Describe verbally the effect of external forces on a solid object
- Concepts & application beyond course
  - Solve out-of-context problems
  - Visualize 3-D problems
  - Communicate technical problems orally
PD’s Response – Goals on Affective Behavior

**GOAL**: To improve

- Interest in the course
- Attitude about
  - Profession
  - Curriculum
  - Department
- Self-confidence
- Intellectual development
PD’s Response – Goals on Success Rates

- Goals on achievement rate changes
  - Improve
    - Recruitment rates
    - Retention or persistence rates
    - Graduation rates
PD’s Response – Goals on Diversity

**GOAL:** To increase a target group’s
- Understanding of concepts
- Achievement rate
- Attitude about profession
- Self-confidence

- “Broaden the participation of underrepresented groups”
Exercise #2: Transforming Goals into Outcomes

Write one expected measurable outcome for each of the following goals:

1. Increase the students’ understanding of the concepts in statics

2. Improve the students’ attitude about engineering as a career
PD’s Response --
Outcomes

Conceptual understanding
• Students will be better able to solve simple conceptual problems that do not require the use of formulas or calculations
• Students will be better able to solve out-of-context problems.

Attitude
• Students will be more likely to describe engineering as an exciting career
• The percentage of students who transfer out of engineering after the statics course will decrease.
Exercise #3: Transforming Outcomes into Questions

Write a question for these expected measurable outcomes:

1. Students will be better able to solve simple conceptual problems that do not require the use of formulas or calculations

2. In informal discussions, students will be more likely to describe engineering as an exciting career
Conceptual understanding

• Did the students’ ability to solve simple conceptual problems increase?
• Did the students’ ability to solve simple conceptual problems increase because of the use of the 3D rendering and animation software?
Attitude

• Did the students’ discussions indicate more excitement, about engineering as a career?

• Did the students’ discussions indicate more excitement, about engineering as a career because of the use of the 3D rendering and animation software?
Part 2

Tools for Evaluating Learning Outcomes
Evaluation

• **Evaluation**: systematic investigation of the worth or merit of an object.

• **NSF project evaluation provides information**:  
  – to help improve the project  
  – for communicating to a variety of stakeholders

• **Project evaluation helps to determine**:  
  – if the project is proceeding as planned  
  – if it is meeting program goals and project objectives

NSF’s Evaluation Handbook, pp. 3-7
Types of Project Evaluation

• **Formative:** Assess ongoing activities from development through project life
  – **Implementation:** is project being conducted as planned
  – **Progress:** is project meeting its goals

• **Summative:** Assess a mature project’s success in reaching goals

NSF's Evaluation Handbook, pp. 10
Methods or Techniques of Project Evaluation

• General Methods:
  – Qualitative (QL): descriptive and interpretative
  – Quantitative (QT): numerical measurement and data analysis
  – Mixed-method (MM): both qualitative and quantitative

• Primary methodologies:
  – Descriptive designs: describe current state of a phenomena (QL, QT, MM)
  – Experimental designs: examine changes as result of intervention (primarily QT)

Olds et al, JEE 94:13, 2005
NSF’s Evaluation Handbook, pp. 43-44
Examples of Tools for Evaluating Learning Outcomes: Descriptive Designs

- **Surveys**
  - Forced choice (QT) or open-ended responses (QL)

- **Interviews**
  - Structured (fixed questions) or in-depth (free flowing)

- **Focus groups**
  - Like interviews but with group interaction

- **Observations**
  - Actually monitor and evaluate behavior

Olds et al, *JEE* 94:13, 2005
NSF’s Evaluation Handbook
Examples of Tools for Evaluating Learning Outcomes: Descriptive Designs

• Other Methods (not frequently used)
  – document studies
  – key informants
  – case studies
  – meta-analysis
  – ethnographic studies
  – conversational analysis

Olds et al, JEE 94:13, 2005
NSF’s Evaluation Handbook
Examples of Tools for Evaluating Learning Outcomes: Experimental Designs

• Randomized controlled trials (RCT)
  – Random assignment to control and treatment groups
  – Considered one of more effective to determine effect of intervention

• Matching
  – Non-Random control and treatment groups
  – Demographic data comparison often used

Olds et al, JEE 94:13, 2005
NSF's Evaluation Handbook
Examples of Tools for Evaluating Learning Outcomes: Experimental Designs

- **Baseline data**
  - Data collected before intervention from same (pre-test) or other group (historical etc.)

- **Longitudinal**
  - Track subjects on key characteristics over number of years
  - Often include control and treatment groups

Olds et al, *JEE* 94:13, 2005
NSF’s Evaluation Handbook
Evaluation Tool Characteristics

• Choose tool applicable to outcomes
  – Suitability for some evaluation questions but not for others
• Choose most rigorous but reasonable
• Advantages and disadvantages of each
  – Olds et al, JEE 94:13, 2005, Tables 1 & 2
Example – Comparing Surveys and Observations

**Surveys**
- Efficient
- Accuracy depends on subject’s honesty
- Difficult to develop reliable and valid survey
- Low response rate threatens reliability, validity, & interpretation

**Observations**
- Time & labor intensive
- Inter-rater reliability must be established
- Captures behavior that subjects unlikely to report
- Useful for observable behavior

Olds et al, *JEE* 94:13, 2005
Example – Appropriateness of Interviews

• Use interviews to answer these questions:
  – What does program look and feel like?
  – What do stakeholders know about the project?
  – What are stakeholders’ and participants’ expectations?
  – What features are most salient?
  – What changes do participants perceive in themselves?

The 2002 User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation, NSF publication REC 99-12175
Concept Inventories (CIs)
Introduction to CIs

• Measures **conceptual understanding**

• **Series of multiple choice questions**
  – Questions involve **single concept**
    • Formulas, calculations, or problem solving not required
  – Possible answers include **“detractors”**
    • Common errors
    • Reflect common **“misconceptions”**
Introduction to CIs

- First CI focused on mechanics in physics
  - Force Concept Inventory (FCI)
- FCI has changed how physics is taught

*The Physics Teacher* 30:141, 1992
*Optics and Photonics News* 3:38, 1992
H₂O is heated in a sealed, frictionless, piston-cylinder arrangement, where the piston mass and the atmospheric pressure above the piston remain constant. Select the best answers.

1. The density of the H₂O will:
   (a) Increase  (b) Remain constant  (c) Decrease

2. The pressure of the H₂O will:
   (a) Increase  (b) Remain constant  (c) Decrease

3. The energy of the H₂O will:
   (a) Increase  (b) Remain constant  (c) Decrease
Other Concept Inventories

• Existing concept inventories
  – Chemistry
  – Statistics
  – Strength of materials
  – Thermodynamics
  – Heat transfer
  -- Fluid mechanics
  -- Circuits
  -- Signals and systems
  -- Electromagnetic waves
  -- Etc.

Richardson, in *Invention and Impact*, AAAS, 2004
Developing Concept Inventories

- Developing CI is involved
  - Identify difficult concepts
  - Identify misconceptions and detractors
  - Develop and refine questions & answers
  - Establish validity and reliability of tool
  - Deal with ambiguities and multiple interpretations inherent in language

Richardson, in *Invention and Impact*, AAAS, 2004
Exercise #4: Evaluating a CI Tool

• Suppose you were considering an existing CI for use in your project’s evaluation

• What questions would you consider in deciding if the tool is appropriate?
PD’s Response -- Evaluating a CI Tool

• Nature of the tool
  – Is the tool relevant to what was taught?
  – Is the tool competency based?
  – Is the tool conceptual or procedural?

• Prior validation of the tool
  – Has the tool been tested?
  – Is there information or reliability and validity?
  – Has it been compared to other tools?
  – Is it sensitive? Does it discriminate novice and expert?

• Experience of others with the tool
  – Has the tool been used by others besides the developer? At other sites? With other populations?
  – Is there normative data?
Tools for Evaluating Affective Factors
Affective Goals

**GOAL:** To improve

- Perceptions about
  - Profession, department, working in teams
- Attitudes toward learning
- Motivation for learning
- Self-efficacy, self-confidence
- Intellectual development
- Ethical behavior
Exercise #5: Tools for Affective Outcome

Suppose your project's outcomes included:

1. Improving perceptions about the profession
2. Improving intellectual development

Answer the two questions for each outcome:

• Do you believe that established, tested tools (i.e., vetted tools) exist?
• Do you believe that quantitative tools exist?
PD Response -- Tools for Affective Outcomes

- Both qualitative and quantitative tools exist for both measurements
Assessment of Attitude - Example

- Pittsburgh Freshman Engineering Survey
  - Questions about perception
    - Confidence in their skills in chemistry, communications, engineering, etc.
    - Impressions about engineering as a precise science, as a lucrative profession, etc.
  - Forced choices versus open-ended
    - Multiple-choice

_Besterfield-Sacre et al, JEE 86:37, 1997_
Assessment of Attitude – Example (Cont.)

• Validated using alternate approaches:
  – Item analysis
  – Verbal protocol elicitation
  – Factor analysis

• Compared students who stayed in engineering to those who left

Besterfield-Sacre et al, JEE 86:37, 1997
Tools for Characterizing Intellectual Development

• Levels of Intellectual Development
  – Students see knowledge, beliefs, and authority in different ways
    • “Knowledge is absolute” versus “Knowledge is contextual”

• Tools
  – Measure of Intellectual Development (MID)
  – Measure of Epistemological Reflection (MER)
  – Learning Environment Preferences (LEP)

Felder et al, JEE 94:57, 2005
Evaluating Skills, Attitudes, and Characteristics

• Tools exist for evaluating
  – Communication capabilities
  – Ability to engage in design activities
  – Perception of engineering
  – Beliefs about abilities
  – Intellectual development
  – Learning Styles

• Both qualitative and quantitative tools exist

Turns et al, JEE 94:27, 2005
Interpreting Evaluation Data
Exercise #6: Interpreting Evaluation Data

Consider the percentages for Concepts #1, #2, and #3 and select the best answer for the following statements for each question:

1. The concept tested by the question was:
   (a) easy  (b) difficult  (c) can’t tell

2. Understanding of the concept tested by the question:
   (a) decreased  (b) increased  (c) can’t tell
## Interpreting Evaluation Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quest</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>Percent with Correct Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PD’s Response -- Interpreting Data

• CI does not measure difficulty
• **Probably** no change in understanding of Concept #1 and #3
• **Probably** an increase in understanding of Concept #2
  – Large variability makes detecting changes difficult
  – 25 % *is expected value from random guessing*
  – *There are statistical tests for identifying significant changes*
Exercise #7: Alternate Explanation For Change

• Data suggests that the understanding of Concept #2 increased

• One interpretation is that the intervention caused the change

• List some alternative explanations
  – Confounding factors
  – Other factors that could explain the change
PD's Response -- Alternate Explanation For Change

- Students learned concept out of class (e.g., in another course or in study groups with students not in the course)
- Students answered with what the instructor wanted rather than what they believed or “knew”
- An external event (big test in previous period or a “bad-hair day”) distorted pretest data
- Instrument was unreliable
- Other changes in course and not the intervention caused improvement
- Students not representative groups
Exercise #8: Alternate Explanation for Lack of Change

• Data suggests that the understanding of Concept #1 did not increase

• One interpretation is that the intervention did cause a change but it was masked by other factors

• List some confounding factors that could have masked a real change
PD's Response -- Alternate Explanations for Lack of Effect

- An external event (big test in previous period or a "bad-hair day") distorted post-test data
- The instrument was unreliable
- Implementation of the intervention was poor
- Population too small
- One or both student groups not representative
- Formats were different on pre and post tests
Evaluation Plan
Exercise #9: Evaluation Plan

• Suppose that a project’s goals are to improve:
  1. The students’ understanding of the concepts in statics
  2. The students’ attitude about engineering as a career

• List the topics that you would address in the evaluation plan
Evaluation Plan -- PD’s Responses

- Goals and outcomes and evaluation questions
- Name & qualifications of the evaluation expert
- Tools & protocols for evaluating each outcome
- Analysis & interpretation procedures
- Confounding factors & approaches for minimizing their impact
- Formative evaluation techniques for monitoring and improving the project as it evolves
- Summative evaluation techniques for characterizing the accomplishments of the completed project.
Working With an Evaluator
What Your Evaluation Can Accomplish

Provide reasonably reliable, reasonably valid information about the merits and results of a particular program or project operating in particular circumstance

• Generalizations are tenuous

• Evaluation
  – Tells what you accomplished
    • Without it you don’t know
  – Gives you a story (data) to share
Perspective on Project Evaluation

• Evaluation is complicated & involved
  – Not an end-of-project “add-on”
• Evaluation requires expertise
• Get an evaluator involved EARLY
  – In proposal writing stage
  – In conceptualizing the project
Finding an Evaluator

- Other departments
  - education, educational psychology, psychology, administration, sociology, anthropology, science or mathematics education, engineering education
- Campus/University teaching and learning center
- Colleagues and researchers
- Professional organizations
- Independent consultants
- NSF sessions or projects

Question: Internal or external evaluator?
Exercise #10: Evaluator Questions

• List two or three questions that an evaluator would have for you as you begin working together on an evaluation plan.
PD Response – Evaluator

Questions

Project issues

– What are the goals and the expected measurable outcomes?
– What are the purposes of the evaluation?
– What do you want to know about the project?
– What is known about similar projects?
– Who is the audience for the evaluation?
– What can we add to the knowledge base?
Operational issues

– What are the resources?
– What is the schedule?
– Who is responsible for what?
– Who has final say on evaluation details?
– Who owns the data?
– How will we work together?
– What are the benefits for each party?
– How do we end the relationship?
Preparing to Work With An Evaluator

- Become knowledgeable
  - Draw on your experience
  - Talk to colleagues
- Clarify purpose of project & evaluation
  - Project’s goals and outcomes
  - Questions for evaluation
  - Usefulness of evaluation
- Anticipate results
  - Confounding factors
Working With Evaluator

Talk with evaluator about your idea (from the start)

– Share the vision

Become knowledgeable

– Discuss past and current efforts

Define project goals, objectives and outcomes

– Develop project logic

Define purpose of evaluation

– Develop questions

– Focus on implementation and outcomes

– Stress usefulness
Culturally Responsive Evaluations

• Cultural differences can affect evaluations
• Evaluations should be done with awareness of cultural context of project
• Evaluations should be responsive to
  – Racial/ethnic diversity
  – Gender
  – Disabilities
  – Language
Anticipate results
  – List expected outcomes
  – Plan for negative findings
  – Consider possible unanticipated positive outcomes
  – Consider possible unintended negative consequences

Interacting with evaluator
  – Identify benefits to evaluator (e.g. career goals)
  – Develop a team-orientation
  – Assess the relationship
## Example of Evaluator’s Tool – Project Logic Table

### The Project
- Goals
- Objectives
- Activities
- Outputs & outcomes
- Measures & methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs/Outcomes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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</table>

What do I want to know about my project?

(a) 

(b)
Human Subjects and the IRB

- Projects that collect data from or about students or faculty members involve human subjects.
- Institution must submit one of these:
  - Results from IRB review on proposal’s coversheet
  - Formal statement from IRB representative declaring the research exempt
    * Not the PI
  - IRB approval form
- See “Human Subjects” section in GPG.
- What if your campus doesn’t have an IRB?

NSF Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)
Other Sources

- NSF’s User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation
- Online Evaluation Resource Library (OERL)
  - http://oerl.sri.com/
- Field-Tested Learning Assessment Guide (FLAG)
  - http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cl1/flag/default.asp
- Science education literature