

IOWA

Division of Student Life

GUIDE ON EMBEDDING ASSESSMENT INTO PROGRAMS

This guide outlines how to embed assessment into programs and services at the University of Iowa. Embedding assessment into programs means integrating data collection directly into your existing activities, whether it be a workshop, course, event, or service, so you can measure learning and make continuous improvements over time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Embed Assessment?	3
The Division of Student Life Assessment Cycle.....	3
Embedding Assessment into Programs & Services	3
Programs	3
Services	4
Step-by-Step: How to Embed Assessment	5
Step 1: Plan with Purpose.....	5
Step 2: Choose an Embedded Tool or Technique	5
Step 3: Embed in the Right Moment.....	5
Step 4: Collect and Organize Data.....	5
Step 5: Analyze and Interpret.....	5
Step 6: Apply and Reassess.....	6
Example: Applying the Process.....	6
Sources	6

Why Embed Assessment?

Embedding assessment turns feedback into an active part of your programming rather than an add-on. It emphasizes quick, meaningful data collection that captures real-time feedback from participants, allowing programs to improve as they happen while reducing the workload for both staff and participants. The goal of embedding assessment is for participants to feel like they aren't doing anything extra beyond the program itself.

Benefits of embedding assessment:

- Higher response rates: participants are already engaged when they respond
- Reduces survey fatigue: replaces lengthy, separate surveys with short reflections or polls
- Feels seamless to participants: assessment becomes part of the activity rather than an extra step
- Provides real-time insights: allows for immediate improvements during or after a session if formative assessment is your goal
- Improves data quality: captures authentic feedback in real-time
- Supports continuous improvement: fosters ongoing reflection for program improvement

The Division of Student Life Assessment Cycle

Embedding assessment falls into the 'Gather Evidence' step of the assessment cycle:

- Identify Goals, Objectives, Learning Outcomes: Define what you hope students or participants will gain from the experience. Goals describe the broad purpose, objectives specify measurable actions or skills, and learning outcomes describe what participants should know, think, value, or be able to do as a result.
- **Gather Evidence: Collect data naturally within the program or service**
- Interpret Evidence: Analyze the results to understand learning and impact
- Implement Change: Make intentional improvements based on findings
- Reassess: Evaluate whether changes led to improvement

Embedding Assessment into Programs & Services

Assessment can be embedded across both programs and services. While the approach differs slightly, the goal is the same – make data/feedback collection part of the experience.

Programs

- Identify the specific learning outcomes for the program or session
 - Example: "Students will be able to describe two stress management techniques."
- Integrate assessment within the experience using Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)
 - Example: minute paper, one-sentence summary, concept map, or live poll (Mentimeter, Kahoot, QR code form)
- Collect results immediately after the activity
 - Review themes, look for patterns, and note areas needing clarification
- Apply insights to improve the next session and re-embed updated prompts or measures

Examples of Embedded Assessment Techniques (CATs adapted for Student Affairs):

Assessing Prior Knowledge, Recall, and Understanding

- **Background Knowledge Probe:** quick check before an event
 - Example: “List two ways you currently manage stress”
- **Focused Listing:** have participants list ideas or skills related to one key concept
 - Example: “List 3 habits that support good sleep”
- **Minute Paper:** at the end of the program, ask: “What was the most important thing you learned?” and “What question remains?”
- **Muddiest Point:** ask “What was the most confusing or unclear part of today’s session?”

Assessing Skill in Application and Performance

- **Application Cards:** ask students to write how they’ll apply a concept
 - Example: “How will you use one strategy to manage your stress this week?”
- **Directed Paraphrasing:** have students explain a skill in their own words
 - Example: “Explain how deep breathing helps manage stress to a friend”
- **Human Tableau/Modeling:** students physically represent or act out a concept
 - Example: role-play an effective peer conversation or time management scenario

Assessing Attitudes, Values, and Self-Awareness

- **Classroom Opinion Polls:** brief Likert-style questions
 - Example: “I feel confident using today’s time management strategies – rate from strongly agree to strongly disagree”
- **Double-Entry Journals:** students write a key quote or takeaway and reflect on why it stands out
- **Course-related Self-Confidence Surveys:** quick check on confidence or readiness to apply a new skill

Assessing Reactions to the Program or Activity

- **Chain Notes:** distribute index cards during a session, students write one insight or question and pass it on
- **Electronic Polls or QR Surveys:** use tools like Mentimeter for live feedback
- **RSQC2 (Recall, Summarize, Question, Connect, Comment):** students recall what stood out, summarize the main idea, ask a question, connect it to their life, and comment on value

Examples:

- During a 45-minute stress management session, peer educators hand out an **application card** at the end asking:
 - “What is one stress management technique you plan to use this week?”
- During a budgeting presentation, participants complete **focused listing** activity halfway through:
 - “List three things that make budgeting difficult for you.”
- At the close of a student leadership workshop, participants complete a **minute paper**:
 - “What is one leadership skill you want to strengthen before your next event?”

Services

- Identify the service or learning outcome. Example: “Students will feel confident using campus wellness resources.”
- Integrate short feedback tools directly into the service flow. Example: one-question checkout survey, QR code at exit, digital rating prompt at exits
- Review responses regularly to track satisfaction or identify emerging needs
- Use results to guide training, improve processes, or communicate impact

Examples of Embedded Service Assessment:

- **Check-in survey:** brief 1-2 question form completed when scheduling or arriving for an appointment
- **Scheduling survey:** brief 1-2 questions included in the online appointment scheduler to understand goals or expectations ahead of time
- **One-question check-out survey:** "Was it easy to find the information you needed today?"
- **QR code on receipts or flyers:** link to a 2-question satisfaction poll
- **Digital exit polls:** pop-up survey after online appointment scheduling
- **Reflection prompts:** "What's one next step you plan to take after this appointment?"
- **Observation checklists:** staff record interactions or track service efficiency
- **Anonymous comment boxes:** quick feedback about space, comfort, or service quality

Examples:

- Student Health: provide a one-question checkout survey via QR code: "Did today's visit help you better understand how to manage your health?"
- Counseling Service: ask clients to complete a reflection prompt: "Which coping skill will you try this week?"
- Dining Halls: add a touchscreen or QR code poll about satisfaction or awareness of healthy choices

Step-by-Step: How to Embed Assessment

Step 1: Plan with Purpose

- Identify 1-2 objectives or outcomes you want to assess in this program or service
- Decide what kind of evidence is most useful (knowledge gained, confidence, application, etc.)

Step 2: Choose an Embedded Tool or Technique

- Match the tool to your purpose (see above for examples of tools for programs and services)
- Select something that fits naturally into the flow of the program or service

Step 3: Embed in the Right Moment

- Place the assessment where it fits naturally in the program or service
 - For example: during a halfway point, a closing question, an exit prompt
- Keep it short and simple – 1-2 questions, no more than a few minutes

Step 4: Collect and Organize Data

- Responses are gathered immediately
- Store data in a physical folder or online spreadsheet for analysis

Step 5: Analyze and Interpret

- Use qualitative analysis to identify themes, patterns, or compelling quotes from open-ended responses
 - Group similar responses/ideas together to find common trends
 - Take note of recurring strengths or areas of confusion
 - [Guide for Qualitative Data Analysis](#)
- Use quantitative analysis to interpret numeric data
 - Summarize results through counts, percentages, or averages

- Identify trends
- [Guide for Quantitative Data Analysis](#)

Step 6: Apply and Reassess

- Share top themes and recommendations with program staff or student employees
- Implement one small change
- Re-embed an assessment technique in the next cycle to assess if the change worked

Example: Applying the Process

During a 45-minute stress management workshop, peer educators hand out an **Application Card** at the end asking, “What is one stress management technique you plan to use this week?”

Responses are grouped into themes such as time management, social support, and mindfulness. Staff notice that mindfulness strategies are mentioned less often.

In the next session, facilitators embed a short **Minute Paper** midway through the workshop asking, “Which technique feels most realistic for you to try today?” They also add a brief guided breathing exercise to encourage the use of the stress management technique of mindfulness.

At the following workshop, a quick **QR poll** asks, “Did you try one of the stress management techniques from last week?” to measure follow-through and close the loop.

Sources

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