

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Based on Institutional Core Values

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Institutions of Higher Education have the responsibility to educate future citizens who will contribute to the social and cultural growth of their community. Starting from this vision Effat University developed an institutional assessment strategy that not only assesses the achievement of the intended learning outcomes in every academic program, but also the achievement of the institutional characteristics.

Accountability issues about institutions of higher education are raised by students, parents, governing bodies, employers, and accreditation organizations. This situation puts a lot of pressure on universities to be transparent about their educational objectives, the methods they use to achieve these objectives, such as teaching methods and student learning experiences, and most importantly the tools they use to assess the achievement of these objectives by the students.

Effat University, the first private non-profit university for women in Saudi Arabia, has a mission directly inspired from its core values “IQRA” or “إِقْرَأْ” in Arabic. The letters of the word IQRA stand for the four core values of research and lifelong learning (Ibath), educational and ethical values (Qiyam), responsible leadership (Riyadah), and meaningful communication and outreach (At-tawasul). Based on its core values, Effat University has adopted from day one the responsibility of graduating not only qualified specialists in the different fields of studies offered at the university, but also developing holistically the undergraduate student into a citizen who is aware of the characteristics she has to demonstrate in the society including professionalism and knowledge seeking, ethical behavior, leadership, and engagement with the community. Each layer of the framework is described below.

1. Effat University’s mission and IQRA core values are the overarching layer based on which the graduate characteristics are defined. The assessment of the achievement of the graduate characteristics is used to directly assess the achievement of the core values and the institutional mission in addition to other indirect assessment tool such as a market study conducted every 5 years to assess the institutional reputation in the community.

2. The Effat graduate characteristics layer is the institutional learning outcomes that are implemented through the academic program learning outcomes. The assessment of the achievement of the program learning outcomes are used to directly determine the achievement of the graduate characteristics in addition to other indirect tools such as the employers' survey and the graduate survey. The characteristics are assessed every year through an annual assessment report.

3. The academic program learning outcomes layer is where the learning outcomes are defined to meet the requirements of the field of study in addition to the institutional characteristics of the graduates. The program learning outcomes are linked to the course learning outcomes in order to implement the intended program learning outcomes through the courses of the program. The program learning outcomes are assessed every year through the annual program report.

4. The course learning outcomes layer directly implements the program learning outcomes through courses. The course learning outcomes are implemented and assessed in every course and every semester. The achievement of the course learning outcomes is used to determine the achievement of the program learning outcomes.

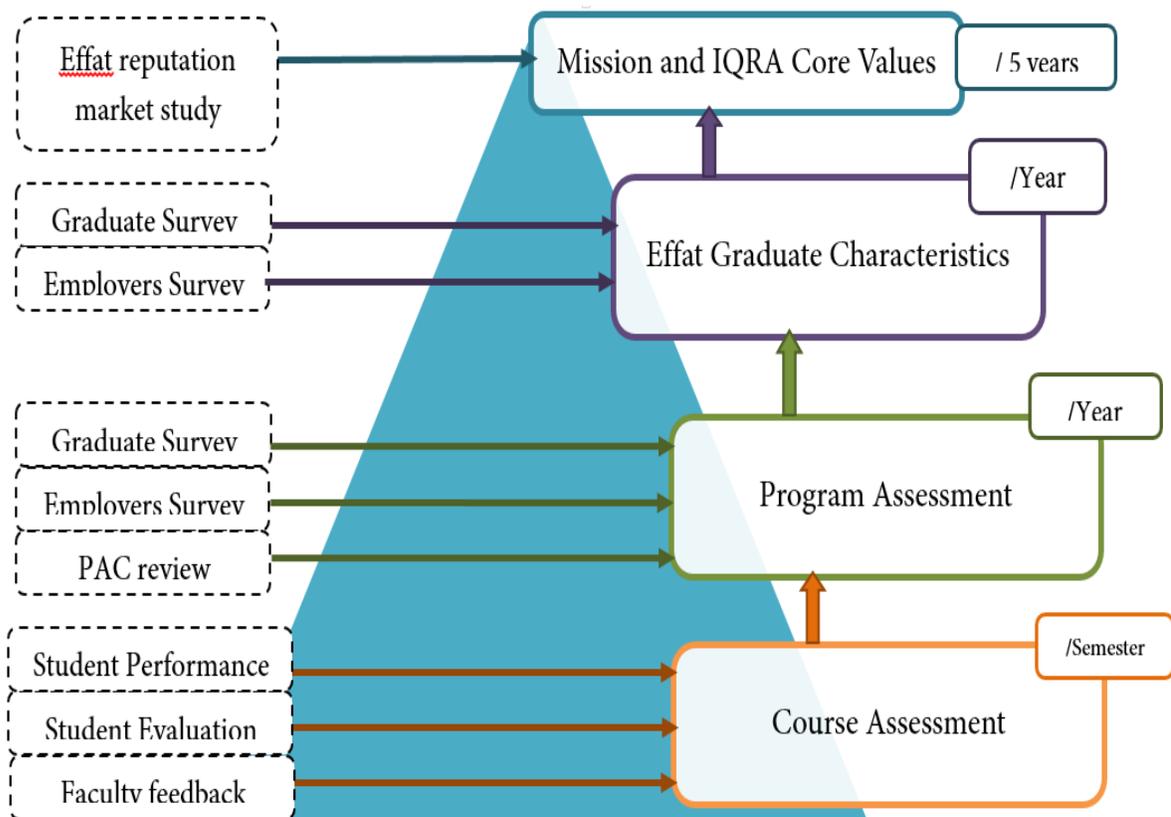


Figure 1: Effat University Assessment Framework

Figure 1 shows the institutional assessment framework at Effat University. The framework is a multi-layered process. The flow through the layers shows the definition of the learning outcomes at each layer and the link(s) between layers. It also shows the learning outcomes assessment data collection for each layer.

We have used three different tools in order to assess the achievement of the four characteristics as illustrated in figure 2. The first tool is a direct tool that is used to assess the achievement of the program's intended learning outcomes (PLOs). The other two tools are indirect assessments based on surveys to collect the opinion of the graduates through the graduate survey and the opinion of the employers through the employers' survey. The three tools allow the collection of information on student achievement of the characteristics from three different sources and therefore allow for cross-validation of the results obtained.

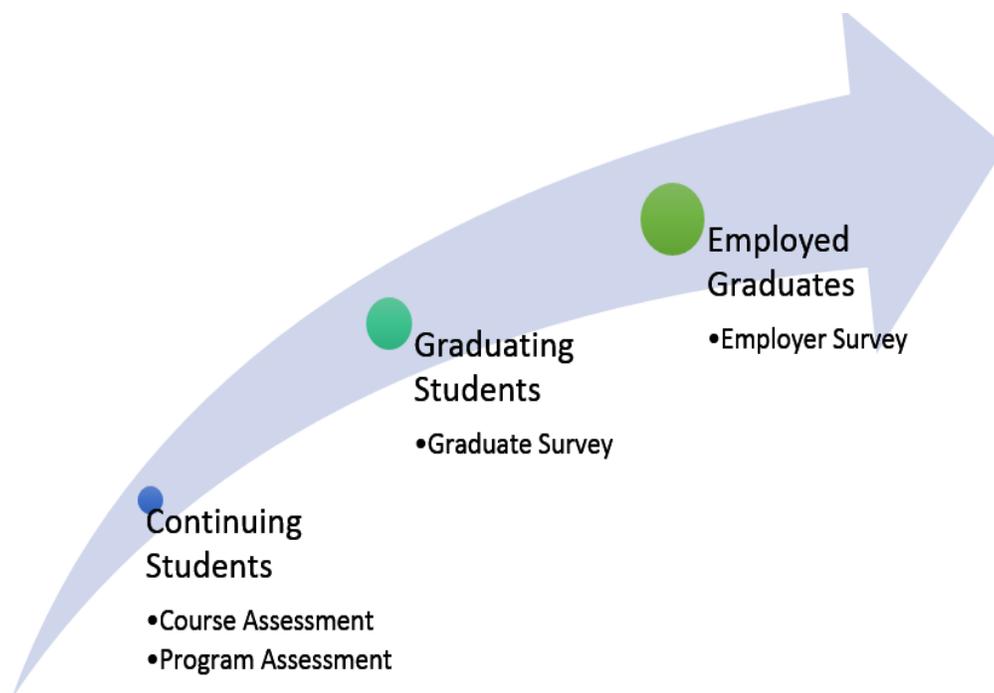


Figure 2: Types of Assessment and the corresponding tools used.

RESULTS

Using the assessment results recorded for the achievement of the program ILOs and the grouping of the PLOs under the characteristics, the achievement of the characteristics was measured by aggregating the results of the corresponding PLOs. Overall, 76% of the students who took part of the assessment achieved the characteristic Itqan, 79% achieved Ihsan, 86% achieved Stewardship, and 79% achieved the Ambassador characteristic. These results show excellent results overall. The lowest rate is obtained for Itqan because it is an average of several PLOs compared to the other characteristics.

Achievement of Effat Graduate Characteristics using Program Student Learning Outcomes

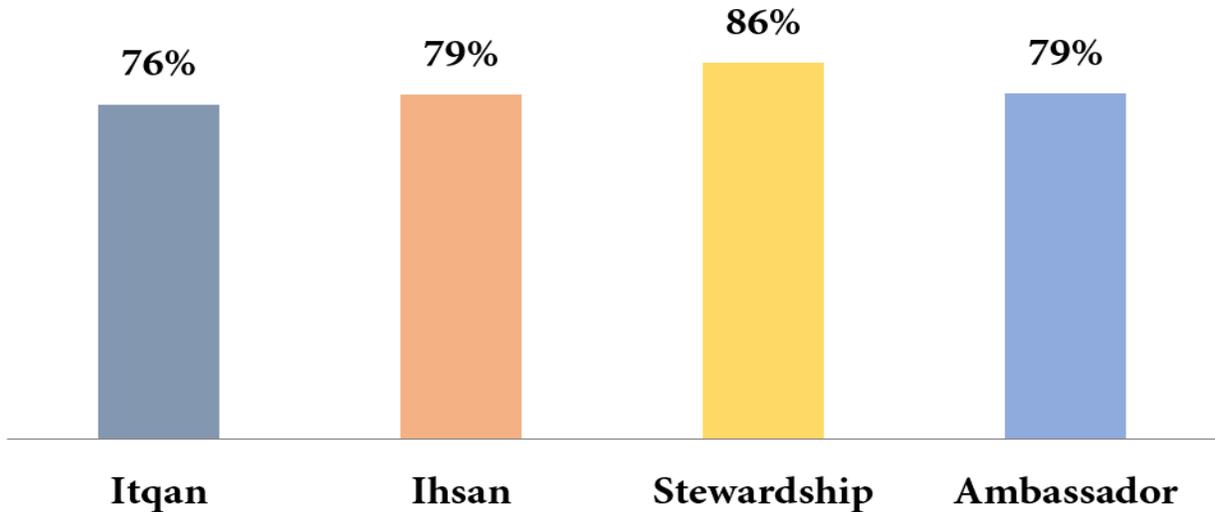


Figure 3: Summary of the Characteristic Assessment for the institution

When the rates recorded for each question under the characteristic have been collected and aggregated (average) to obtain an overall rate for the corresponding characteristic, we obtained the results summarized in Figure 6. The graduate survey results indicate that the graduates rated the Itqan at 73%, the Ihsan at 79%, the Stewardship at 76% and the Ambassador characteristic at 80%. This is a very good result and well correlated to the results obtained using direct assessment tools.

Achievement of Effat Graduate Characteristics (Graduate Survey)

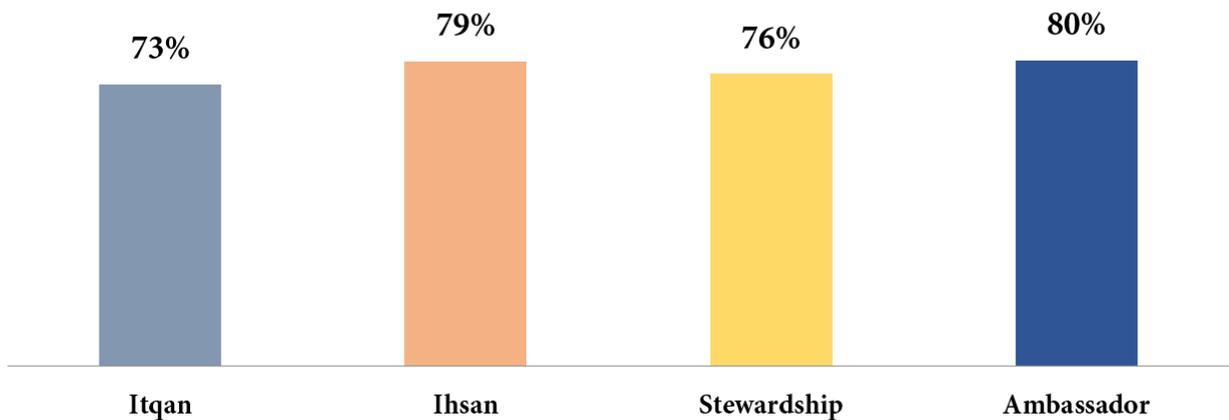


Figure 4: Characteristic rating using the graduate survey.

CONCLUSION

A holistic assessment framework for student learning outcomes which starts from the core values and the graduate characteristics at Effat University has been presented. The implementation of the process and the results obtained for the academic year 2014-2015 are shown in this paper. This model of assessment is an overarching methodology that may be adopted and applied by any institution to assess the achievement of student learning outcomes, not only in every program but also for all the graduates of the university, based on the institutional educational objectives or the characteristics that the university intends to achieve in every graduate.

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