

Empirical and Action Research

University Assessment Services, Illinois State University

Characteristic	Empirical Research	Action Research (Assessment & Evaluation)
Intent & Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No practical purpose in mind Satisfying curiosity Contributing to a field's literature Advancing knowledge 	Assessment: Data gathering and analysis Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deciding merit or worth Decision-making for improvement
Scope	Narrow to the discipline	Focused on a class, program, or institution
Agenda	Set by the individual researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set by program stakeholders, leaders, & decision-makers Student learning outcomes Program effectiveness goals
Study Origins	Curiosity	
Accountability	Research community , other faculty	Stakeholders , public, students
Timeliness	Any time	Summative – at the end of the program Formative – continuous and ongoing
Values	Neutral if quantitative Embedded if qualitative	Must represent the values of various stakeholders
Criteria for Judging the Research Questions	Validity, reliability, peers What are we curious about? What can I contribute to the literature? Will a journal accept this?	Utility in making decisions Accountability Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summative – what have students learned? Formative – how is learning going? Program Effectiveness/Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summative – how did the program do? Should it be continued? Formative – how is the program doing?
Goals	Research questions	Student Learning Outcomes/Goals – what students do Program Effectiveness Goals – what programs do
Timing	Planning the road before it is built	Summative – Judging the road after it's been built Formative – Making the road while walking on it
Implications for Professional Practice	Tenure Contributions to the literature	Becoming a reflective practitioner
Collaboration	Generally done by individuals or small groups; stakeholders generally not considered	Generally an evaluator or administrator lead with broad input from stakeholders
Examples	Research studies in a journal article	Summative – program review, CAS review, testing Formative – classroom assessment

Table elements adapted from: Boulmetis, J., & Dutwin, P. (2005). *The ABCs of Evaluation: Timeless Techniques for Program and Project Managers*. San Francisco: Wiley. Bresciani, M.J., Gardner, M.M., & Hickmott, J. (2009). *Demonstrating Student Success: A Practical Guide to Outcomes-based Assessment of Learning and Development in Student Affairs*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.; Guerra-Lopez, I.J. (2008). *Performance Evaluation: Proven Approaches for Improving Program and Organizational Performance*. San Francisco: Wiley.; Upcraft, M.L., & Schuh, J. (2002). Assessment vs Research: Why We Should Care About the Difference. *About Campus*, 7, 16-20; Lodico, M.G., Spaulding, D.T., & Voegtler, K.H. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco: Wiley. Road metaphor from this publication.

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Where assessment and evaluation happens

