What is program learning assessment, and how does it differ from student learning assessment? Presumably, we all understand student learning assessment because that is what we already do in the context of grading, narrative assessment, and providing feedback and mentoring to individual students on their respective progress, growth, and development within our programs. Program learning assessment, on the other hand, deals with the aggregate picture of the learning of our student body and is evidence-based.

It is important to recognize that, unlike student assessment, program assessment does not assess the individual students; it only assesses their submitted work. Assessment of individual pieces of student work (which can even be assessed anonymously, without reference to who the student is) are aggregated to provide a picture of how well the student body as a whole is achieving the stated learning goals of a program. The analysis of the aggregated information provided by our Manager of Institutional Research & Assessment to the Provost, program directors, and faculty allows us to make evidence-based adjustments and improvements to our curriculum on the basis of hard data. This can significantly help us improve our programs using aggregated longitudinal data that goes beyond what we can glean impressionistically from individual student assessments.

What is the purpose and logic of rubric scoring? Descriptive rubrics (such as the new Rabbinical School rubric developed by the National Assessment Committee working with the entire faculty) reflect the particular learning goals of a program. The rubrics identify each of the significant dimensions and areas of learning that take place in that program. They are “backwards constructed,” first identifying the program’s learning goals, i.e. what we want students to be able to do and to know at the conclusion of the program. They then identify several developmental levels culminating in the achievement of the program learning goals. Because we want our students to continue learning during the course of their careers, we have also included an “Aspirational” level signaling learning goals beyond the point of completion. However, we anticipate that little if any student work will evidence that level of development.

Why are there two intermediate “developing” levels? In accordance with best assessment practices, it can be helpful to divide the “developing level” into earlier and more advanced phases. This provides us with a more nuanced picture of the aggregated information.

What are the models and sources on which the Rabbinical School rubric draws? The descriptions in the Rabbinical School rubric represent an update of the the text of the Norman Cohen assessment matrix from 2006. Descriptions in the “Written Communication” and “Critical Thinking Skills” were drawn from the Association of American Colleges & Universities’ (AAC&U) published rubrics. Everything else was newly drafted by members of the faculty, particularly those who are subject matter experts (e.g., “Leadership Development,” “Education,” “Pastoral Counseling,” and “Hebrew”). The entire rubric has been vetted by the National Assessment Committee and shared with all faculty colleagues for input, revision, and improvement. Its current iteration, therefore, should reflect the consensus of the entire faculty.