Teaching Support Guide: Introduction to Responsible Research Assessment Course

DORA's **Introduction to Responsible Research Assessment Course** is an approachable, entry-level course to anyone seeking to learn about responsible research assessment. The Course provides a foundational understanding of research assessment reform, including lessons that cover: what is research assessment, what are the issues with traditional assessment practices, how is responsible research assessment addresses those issues, and practical examples of how responsible research assessment can be applied in the real world.

This brief **Teaching Support Guide** was created to help trainers use the DORA *Introduction to RRA Course* for training and guided discussions. It includes an overview of key takeaways from each lesson, suggestions for how to approach teaching each lesson, discussion questions, and a short slide deck to help trainers incorporate lesson concepts into their materials.

1 Who is it for?

Who is the course For? The course is introductory and open to everyone, regardless of career level or discipline, seeking to learn about responsible research assessment.

- **Learners could be:** anyone working in research, research administration or leadership, research funding or policy, scholarly publishing or communication, or metrics providers.

Who is this guide for? This guide is for trainers (e.g., anyone who will teach or educate about responsible research assessment).

- **Trainers could be:** research mentors or principle investigators, human resources professionals, librarians, administrators, speakers who are giving a talk about responsible research assessment, and so on.

2 How to use this Teaching Guide?

Trainers can review this Guide to determine which lesson best fits their context and needs. For each lesson, the Guide offers: learning objectives, key concepts, discussion questions, and a slide deck.

Below are examples of how trainers can use the Course and this Guide:

- **Take the course**: Have learners register online to take the course and use it as a springboard for deeper discussion during a lesson, workshop, etc.
- **Use for training:** Incorporate key lesson concepts and definitions into training processes. For example: seminars/workshops that introduce responsible research assessment, graduate student ethics courses, or faculty training.

3 Why use this guide?

Because responsible research assessment is a topic relevant to all members of the academic system (e.g., researchers and research performing organizations, research funding organizations, national bodies, publishers), learners can come from different levels of understanding, and different professional and disciplinary backgrounds. It can be time-consuming to create learning materials from scratch. This flexible resource aims to reduce some of that burden by providing trainers with a brief set of key concepts, definitions, discussion questions, and practical case study examples for foundational responsible research assessment topics to inspire you to take these further.

4 What's in it?

Course Content

Lesson 1: What is Responsible Research Assessment?

Lesson 2: Responsible research assessmentImpacts Everyone in the Academic System

Lesson 3: Limitations of Traditional Assessment Approaches and Quantitative Indicators

Lesson 4: How can responsible research assessment be applied to real-world assessment scenarios?

5 Take the course

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

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Questions? Contact us at info@sfdora.org

Lesson 1: What is Responsible Research Assessment?

This lesson introduces learners to the core definition, purpose, and scope of responsible research assessment. Lesson 1 is ideal for learners who are new to research assessment and responsible research assessment and can be adapted for learners who have firmly held beliefs around traditional research assessment practices.

Learning Objectives (after this lesson, learners will be able to):

- Define responsible research assessment and articulate what it aims to accomplish.
- Describe the intersection of responsible research assessment with other efforts to improve academic culture.
- Evaluate personal assumptions and experiences with research assessment.

1 Key Lesson Concepts

Research assessment shapes how and what type of research is conducted by providing signals and incentives for specific kinds of work and outputs. For example, more traditional assessment methods often rely on indicators like publication counts and venue prestige, which can devalue essential contributions like mentorship, transparent and reproducible research practices, academic service, community engagement, and interdisciplinary work.

Research assessment shapes key career decisions like hiring, promotion, tenure, and grant allocation. Assessment can occur at the level of individual researchers, research groups, institutions, or national systems.

Responsible research assessment is a modern shift in research assessment that moves beyond traditional, often narrow, measures of success to encourage a more holistic evaluation that captures the full richness and value of research and a researchers' work.

R**esponsible research assessment is deeply interconnected with broader efforts to improve academic culture**, including research integrity and reproducibility, fostering open scholarship, and societal impact.

2 Discussion Questions

The following are potential questions that trainers can use or adapt for their unique situations. These questions can posed to workshop participants, trainees, etc.:

What is research assessment and what are the pitfalls of traditional assessment approaches?

Consider how you were trained on and/or how you currently think about research assessment. How do you currently judge research quality?

Reflect on your own values around research quality and impact. How are those values reflected in the work you do? If you feel that they are not reflected adequately, what would you change?

What does responsible research assessment mean to you? How might this change your approach to thinking about research quality (either for hiring, applying for jobs, reviewing, etc.) in the future?

3 Trainer Tip

Unless you are confident that your audience is well-versed in traditional research assessment practices, we recommend keeping the foundational definitions.

Your audience may be at different career stages, may not have received formal training on research assessment practices, and they may use different words and terms for the same process. Therefore, it's important for everyone to have a shared understanding of what research assessment is before learning about responsible research assessment.

4 Important links

Course

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

Lesson Slides

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

Glossary & Reading List

https://sfdora.org/resource/introduction-to-rra-course-lesson-2-glossary-and-reading-list-2/

Lesson 2: Responsible Research Assessment Impacts Everyone in the Academic System

This lesson describes how research assessment practices have a far-reaching impact on the academic system, from what type of work is rewarded with funding and promotions to how universities are evaluated. This lesson also outlines the role of responsible research assessment to address systemic issues and drive institutional change. Lesson 2 builds on the basic concepts introduced in Lesson 1.

Learning Objectives (after this lesson, learners will be able to):

- Describe key actors within the system who influence research assessment practices.
- Describe different responsible research assessment-advocating initiatives and the types of resources they provide.
- Define the interconnectedness of the academic system and explain how this relates to the "systems problem" of research assessment.

1 Key Lesson Concepts

The academic system is a complex network of systems that includes individual researchers, institutions, funders, publishers, national bodies, and scholarly societies, providers and more.

Research assessment is a "systems problem" because it involves multiple interconnected actors where issues or changes in one part of the system inevitably have ripple effects throughout the rest.

Key institutional actors driving or implementing responsible research assessment include research funding organizations, national bodies, publishers, and research performing organizations.

Internal organizational departments like Human Resources, Library staff, IT, and research managers are crucial implementers of responsible research assessment.

Global initiatives like the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), CoARA, and FOLEC-CLACSO provide leadership, guidance, and community for reform efforts.

2 Discussion Questions

The following are potential questions that trainers can use or adapt for their unique situations. These questions can posed to workshop participants, trainees, etc.:

What do you think quality research or quality researchers are from the perspectives of the different communities you interact with?

Why is it important that responsible research assessment is adopted across the whole research system?

What can go wrong if reform efforts do not involve enough members of the research system? What might go wrong if reform efforts are too broad (e.g., not allowing flexibility across regions, national contexts, disciplines, etc.)

For research assessment, issues or changes in one part of the system ripple out to impact the entire system. This can include: how researchers are hired and promoted; how funders allocate grants; how universities are assessed; and how scholarly societies select leadership. How do you experience these interdependencies?

3 Trainer Tip

This lesson is meant to help learners better understand their professional ecosystem and how responsible research assessment aims to modernize and address sytemic issues within that system.

It can be difficult to look beyond our own silos, especially without any sort of formal training on how the academic system functions. We recommend that you focus on teaching:

- how the research system is interconnected and
- the far reaching impact of how research is assessed.

4 Important links

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Glossary & Reading List

https://sfdora.org/resource/introduction-to-rra-course-lesson-2-glossary-and-reading-list-2/

Lesson 3: Limitations of Traditional Assessment Approaches and Quantitative Indicators

This lesson introduces learners to traditional assessment approaches and examples of quantitative indicators that are commonly misused. It covers five guiding principles for the responsible use of metrics and explores how personal and systemic biases influence assessment decisions. Lesson 3 is ideal for learners who are unfamiliar with traditional approaches and new to research assessment and responsible research assessment.

Learning Objectives (after this lesson, learners will be able to):

- Describe traditional assessment approaches and specific quantitative indicators that are commonly misused.
- Break down how to apply responsible research assessment principles to different assessment scenarios.
- Describe five guiding principles for the more responsible use of quantitative indicators.

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1 Key Lesson Concepts

Traditional approaches often fall short. They often rely on:

- Narrow set of quantitative indicators
- Publication-based criteria and metrics like
  - Publication counts
  - Citation rates
- “Laundry-list” CVs
- Institution prestige
- Grant income as primary measures of value

Five principles for responsible use of metrics are:

- Be clear
- Be transparent
- Be specific
- Be contextual
- Be fair

Cognitive and systems biases can unconsciously skew assessment decisions toward the status quo.

2 Discussion Questions

The following are potential questions that trainers can use or adapt for their unique situations. These questions can posed to workshop participants, trainees, etc.:

Review the Building Blocks for Impact*. What three blocks jump out at you as the most appealing type of impactful work? How is this work recognized (or not recognized) by traditional assessment approaches?

Create a list of the different types of work that researchers do. Based on the lesson, what work is traditionally rewarded, what work is not? Why might this present a problem for academic culture and research quality?

If you were in a leadership position, how might you apply responsible research assessment to your organization’s assessment approaches to better recognize more types of work? What would you change and why?

3 Trainer Tip

This lesson is meant to give learners an understanding of commonly used traditional assessment approaches, including shortcomings, and an understanding of all the types of work that researchers do.

This lesson includes definitions of different quantitative indicators used for assessment which may not be relevant for all disciplines. Trainers should focus on context specific lesson content. For example: if your audience is of a discipline that does not use JIF or h-index, you should focus on the quantitative indicators that are relevant for your disciplinary context.

4 Important links

Course

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Lesson Slides

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

Glossary & Reading List

https://sfdora.org/resource/introduction-to-rra-course-lesson-3-glossary-and-reading-list/

*Schmidt, R. (2022). Building Blocks for Impact. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7249187

Lesson 4: How can RRA be applied to real-world assessment scenarios?

This lesson grounds RRA knowledge in practical, real-world examples of change. It introduces innovations where traditional assessment methods are replaced or modified by more responsible approaches. Lesson 4 is ideal for learners ready to think about tangible reforms, such as using narrative CVs or bias-mitigating review panels, within their own professional contexts.

Learning Objectives (after this lesson, learners will be able to):

- Describe basic examples of how RRA can be applied in practical, real-world scenarios.
- Analyze how to apply RRA principles to relevant scenarios in their own work or organization.

1 Key Lesson Concepts

There are many examples of real-world innovations from across the research system, from research performing organizations, research funding organizations, and national assessment bodies. This lesson covers the following examples:

- **Narrative CVs:** Instead of simply listing publications, Narrative CVs encourage a qualitative and contextualized description of contributions and impact, expanding what is valued to include collaborative roles, community engagement, and other forms of work that might not be captured by traditional metrics.
- **Bias-Mitigating Panels**: Traditional assessment panels may can inadvertently perpetuate biases (such as confirmation bias, affinity bias, and the halo effect). Diversifying committee composition, providing bias training, utilizing structured rubrics, and implementing debiasing techniques in deliberative processes.
- **Responsible Education on Quantitative Indicators**: Responsible education around commonly used (and misused) quantitative indicators promotes a critical understanding of their strengths and limitations.

2 Discussion Questions

The following are potential questions that trainers can use or adapt for their unique situations. These questions can posed to workshop participants, trainees, etc.:

Which of the RRA innovations do you think would be most impactful or feasible in your specific organization and context? Note: if the trainer is aware of additional ideas for innovations that are a better fit for their unique context, feel welcome replace the list below.

- Narrative CVs
- Bias-mitigating panels
- Responsible education on quantitative indicators

Are there any specific takeaways from these practical examples that you could implement in your own work today?

What risks or unintended consequences should institutions watch for when adopting these RRA innovations?

3 Trainer Tip

This lesson ties together what was learned in lessons 1-3 and outlines practical examples of traditional assessment scenarios and examples of RRA can be applied in each of those scenarios. These scenarios are important for learners at any career stage to be exposed to. If learners are early career, focus on training them how to recognize and understand problematic vs. responsible practices in their careers. If learners are late career or in positions to influence policy, these scenarios could be taken as exercises and if appropriate paired e.g. with DORA's Practical Guide*. Trainers should use these scenarios as an exercise for learners. You may select or create one or more scenarios that best fits your context/discipline to use for guided discussion and problem solving.

4 Important links

RRA Course

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

Lesson Slides

https://sfdora.org/courses/introductory-course-to-responsible-research-assessment/

Glossary & Reading List

https://sfdora.org/resource/introduction-to-rra-course-lesson-4-glossary-and-reading-list/

Allen, L., Barbour, V., Cobey, K., Faulkes, Z., Hazlett, H., Lawrence, R., Lima, G., Massah, F., & Schmidt, R. (2025). A Practical Guide to Implementing Responsible Research Assessment at Research Performing Organizations. Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15000683