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Introduction to Academic Program Assessment

What is Assessment?
Assessment involves gathering information and documenting results on a continual basis to identify successes and potential areas of improvement. In higher education, assessment can refer to processes at the classroom, course, academic program, or institutional levels. This handbook focuses on the assessment of student learning at the academic program level. Academic program assessment is guided by two primary questions. First, ‘What do we want students to learn in our program?’ Second, ‘How do we know that students are learning what we want them to learn in our program?’

Specifically, academic program assessment involves:

- Establishing clear, measurable, expected outcomes of student learning: what we hope students will know, value, or be able to do upon completion of the academic program.
- Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes through the academic program curriculum.
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations.
- Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning within the academic program.

(Adapted from Suskie, 2009)

For assessment to be successful, it should produce actionable information that results in meaningful improvements to student learning. Astin (1992) developed a list of nine principles of good practice for assessing student learning.

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Our values should determine what we choose to assess. Otherwise, assessment risks becoming a check-box exercise to fulfill external requirements.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Practically, this entails assessing student learning in multiple ways, across multiple modalities, in a longitudinal manner, to capture the complexity of the learning process and student growth over time.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment should be directly linked to the academic program’s educational purpose, goals, and expectations. These shared goals form the foundation for the curricular and instructional design of the academic program and provide the focus for assessment.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Improvements in student outcomes will result from improvements to the
curricula, instruction, and other academic and co-curricular experiences that lead to those outcomes.

5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.** Assessment should measure progress towards goals over time, with a focus on continuous improvement.

6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Assessment should be a collaborative activity in which people from across the campus community and, as appropriate, beyond the campus community, share the responsibility for student learning and participate in the assessment process.

7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment approaches should be designed to address meaningful questions of interest to stakeholders.

8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment is most effective when practiced in a setting that values, prioritizes, and invests in quality teaching and learning.

9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** We have an obligation to provide information to internal and external stakeholders about the extent to which students are meeting our goals and expectations. We have an even deeper obligation to continuously improve our academic programs for the betterment of our students and communities.

**Why Participate in Assessment?**

Faculty participate in assessment constantly, regularly designing courses around what they want students to learn, creating methods to assess student learning (in the form of exams, assignments, and other classroom activities), and using those methods in concert with observations and experience to revise course content and instructional techniques. Academic program assessment formalizes these assessment activities and generates data that can be used across the academic program to drive improvements and decision-making, communicate to current and prospective students and their parents, and serve as evidence to accrediting bodies and funding agencies.

The main purposes of program assessment are as follows:

1. **To inform:** the assessment process should reveal the extent to which students are achieving intended outcomes and clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the academic program.

2. **To improve:** the assessment process should produce information regarding how to improve teaching and learning at the academic program level.

3. **To prove:** the assessment process should demonstrate what the academic program is accomplishing to internal and external stakeholders and be used to support external accountability activities, including compliance with accreditation requirements.
4. **To support** the assessment process should produce actionable, meaningful information that enables data-based decisions at the academic program level.

(Adapted from UCF Academic Assessment Handbook; UMass Program Assessment Handbook)

All Academic Programs that award a credential (i.e., a degree or certificate) are **REQUIRED to Participate in Assessment.**

UTSA’s accrediting body, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), requires outcomes assessment of all educational programs, administrative support services, academic and student services, and general education competencies.

As stated in Section 7: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness of the 2018 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation,

> “An institutional planning and effectiveness process involves all programs, services, and constituencies; is linked to decision-making processes at all levels; and provides a sound basis for budgeting decisions and resource allocations.”

Section 8.2 of the 2018 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation outlines specific assessment requirements for academic programs:

> “The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

a. **Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.**”

In addition, UTSA outlines institution-specific requirements for academic program assessment in Section 2.21 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures: [http://www.utsa.edu/hop/chapter2/2-21.html](http://www.utsa.edu/hop/chapter2/2-21.html).

**FAQ: Are there any academic programs that do not have to participate in assessment?**

Stand-alone minors and program concentrations are not required to have their own assessment plans.
Overview of Academic Program Assessment at UTSA

Academic program assessment at UTSA begins with the definition of formal, systematic assessment plans for each program. Assessment plans include specified program goals, measurable student learning outcomes related to each goal, planned methods of assessing each student learning outcome, and a results-oriented target or benchmark related to each method of assessment. Assessment plans may be viewable by both internal and external audiences, including regional accrediting agencies. Subsequent sections of the handbook will provide detailed information about how to develop each of these components.

General Principles of UTSA Academic Program Assessment

The Student Outcomes Assessment Committee developed a set of core principles to guide academic affairs assessment at UTSA:

1. The purpose of assessment of student learning is to document and improve the quality of the University’s programs.
2. Assessment of student learning will be guided by UTSA’s mission and, specifically, by student learning outcomes statements.
3. The Student Outcomes Assessment Committee will provide oversight of the University’s assessment system and processes to include determining expectations and standards for assessment quality and reporting.
4. All academic programs will develop and implement plans for assessment of student learning based on their stated learning outcomes and document the use of assessment results to enhance student learning. An academic program is defined as a program of study over a period of time that leads to a credential.
5. Faculty direct the process of assessment of student learning in their own academic programs. In general, this process will include the determination of learning outcomes, selection of suitable methods for assessment of student learning, analysis and interpretation of assessment information, and use of assessment results.
6. Direct methods of assessing student learning are emphasized. However, the assessment method employed will depend on both the nature of the learning outcomes and the type of student learning assessment most appropriate for individual programs. Course grades are not adequate indicators of specific learning outcomes.
7. Assessment of student learning will be done in a planned, ongoing, and systematic manner.
8. Evaluation of assessment results will be limited to making curricular or program improvements to enhance student learning. Specifically, assessment results will not be used for any faculty, staff, or student evaluation.
9. The process of assessment of student learning will be monitored and reviewed on a regular cycle, and revised as required.

Cycle and Timeline

All academic programs participate in a two-year assessment cycle, depicted below.
In Year 1 of the cycle, academic programs conduct the assessment activities described in their formal assessment plans and document findings in results reports completed at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters. See a detailed Year 1 Timeline below.

In Year 2 of the cycle, faculty members review the results reports from the previous academic year and identify specific strategies to improve their academic programs. These identified improvement strategies are documented in a Use of Results for Improvement report completed during the fall semester. Program faculty then implement the identified improvement strategies and document their progress in an Implementation of Improvement Strategies report completed at the conclusion of the spring semester. See a detailed Year 2 Timeline below.
Reporting Software

The tool selected by UTSA for documenting the evidence of our assessment efforts is TracDat. TracDat is not assessment, nor does it teach individuals how to assess. TracDat is a web-based repository for assessment information that assists us in organizing and managing the assessment process.

The Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation coordinates assessment for the campus and will review the data you enter into TracDat. TracDat data is also used for internal and external reports, including reports to regional accrediting agencies, and for institutional planning purposes. Assessment plans (but not assessment results) may be publicly posted on the institutional website.

The following link provides a TracDat handbook for Academic Programs: http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/TracDat.asp

Contact the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation for TracDat software support and for information about TracDat trainings at ext. 4706.
How do you develop a mission statement?

Mission statements enable the academic program to define its purpose within the context of the greater institutional mission. The program mission statement should effectively communicate to internal and external stakeholders what the program is, what it does, and for whom. It should state in specific terms how the program contributes to the education and careers of its graduates. To develop a mission statement, encourage program faculty to discuss the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the program? For example, does it exist to prepare students for specific types of careers or graduate education?
- Who are your primary stakeholders? Indicate who benefits from the program and its graduates.
- What are the most important functions, activities, services, and offerings of the program?
- How does the program support the missions of the institution, college, and department?

Once the unit has drafted a statement addressing the preceding questions, ensure that the resulting statement is specific and unique enough that it differentiates the academic program from others.

Example Mission Statements

- **BA Economics**: “To provide students with the opportunity to gain the necessary theoretical and quantitative tools in economics such that they can understand and apply economics in their daily lives, seek advanced degrees in economics, pursue careers in the global marketplace, and engage in public policymaking.”
- **MS Civil Engineering**: “To produce graduates who are capable of research and professional practice in a specialized area of Civil Engineering, namely environmental engineering, geotechnical engineering, structural engineering, transportation engineering, and water resources engineering.”
- **EdD Educational Leadership**: “To prepare educators to become transformational leaders who can work effectively in diverse, ambiguous, and challenging contexts. The goals of this transformational leadership include equity, excellence, social justice, democracy, risk-taking, and responsiveness to community needs.”

What are program goals?

Successful academic program assessment depends upon the determination of shared goals specifying what the program intends to accomplish.

‘Goals’ can be defined in several ways. This handbook focuses on the development of student learning goals at the academic program level, which describe in broad terms how we want students to be different as a result of completing the academic program (Suskie, 2009). More specifically, student
learning goals specify the *knowledge, values, or skills* we want students to have acquired throughout the program.

Of course, programs may have additional goals unrelated to student learning (e.g., attaining a specialized accreditation, minimizing time to degree, increasing enrollments, etc.). In any case, program goals should align with department, college, and institutional goals. Program goals do not have to be directly measurable (this will be achieved with related Student Learning Outcomes) and may be aspirational, representing what the program hopes to accomplish over the next several years.

Shared goals provide the foundation for the program’s curricula and guide the selection of questions to address via assessment.

**How do you develop program goals?**

Achieving consensus for program goals can be challenging, as program faculty may have varied perspectives on student learning, disciplinary subspecialties, and teaching techniques. The following activities can serve as a starting point to brainstorm potential program goals.

*Engage program faculty in the following discussions:*

- Describe the ‘ideal student’ graduating from your program.
  - What does this student know?
  - What can this student do?
  - What does this student care about?
  - What program experiences contributed the most to the development of this ideal student?
- What achievements do you expect of all graduates from your program?
- Describe program alumni in terms of their achievements.

*Collect and review current program descriptions and institutional materials. These may come from:*

- Catalog and brochure descriptions.
- Program review reports.
- Mission and vision statements.
- External accreditation agencies.
- Departmental or college strategic plans.
- Institutional strategic plans.

*Collect and review course and instructional materials, such as:*

- Syllabi and course descriptions from core program courses or capstone courses.
- Assignments and tests in core program courses.
- Discipline-specific textbook introductory or summary sections.
Review other programs’ goals

- What are the program goals of other program in your department or college?
- What are the programs goals of similar programs at other universities?

Use the Delphi method to Achieve Consensus

- Create a list of all identified potential learning goals for a program
- Distribute the list to program faculty and ask them to check off the goals they believe are ‘key’ to the program.
- Tabulate and present the results to program faculty.
- A few goals may emerge as clear contenders for the program, but the process may be repeated until consensus is achieved.

(Adapted from UCF Academic Assessment Handbook; UMass Program Assessment Handbook)

How do you write program goals?
There is not necessarily one ‘right’ way to write program goal statements, but the following is a common structure:

“To (ACTION VERB) + Students’ + (Program-specific knowledge, values, or skills)”

(Adapted from UCF Academic Assessment Handbook)

Examples Goal Statements:

- “To develop students’ managerial, interpersonal, organizational, communications, analytical, and diagnostic skills.”
- “To prepare students for careers in the Accounting industry.”
- “To teach students to work and lead effectively in diverse and international teams and organizations.”
Developing an Academic Program Assessment Plan: Specifying Student Learning Outcomes

What are Student Learning Outcomes?

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) describe the specific, measurable *knowledge, values, or skills* that students will be able to demonstrate upon completing the academic program *using precise language focused on the student*, as opposed to the program. SLOs directly relate to the program’s identified goals and address the specific behaviors students must demonstrate to prove that the program is making progress towards their goals.

To develop SLOs, examine each of your program’s goals. For each goal, ask:

- “What specifically would students have to do to convince us that this goal was being achieved?”
- “How would we prove to others that students are achieving this goal?”

(Adapted from UMass Program Assessment Handbook)

SLOs should be SMART (Doran, 1981):

**Specific**

- Stated in definite language, SLOs should describe the specific knowledge, values, or skills graduates from the program are expected to demonstrate.

**Measurable**

- Data related to the SLO should be readily available, and the data collection process should be feasible considering available time and resources.

**Aggressive but Attainable**

- In the spirit of continuous improvement, program faculty and staff should determine an assessable criterion for success or benchmark for the SLO that will progressively move the program closer to achieving its goals.

**Results-oriented and Time-bound**

- SLOs should specify what students’ levels competence should be after a finite period of time (e.g., 5% improvement in pass rates on the state licensure exam in the next year). These specifications may be based on experience, previous assessment results, external requirements, local, state, or national benchmarks, etc.
How do you write Student Learning Outcomes?
As with program goals, there is no one ‘right’ way to write SLOs, but the following is a popular structure:

“Students will be able to (ACTION VERB) (Product of specific knowledge, value, or skill)

(Adapted from Florida International University Assessment Handbook)

Example SLOs:
- “Students will be able to identify historical periods of English literature.”
- “Students will be able to apply differential calculus to model rates of change in time of physical and biological phenomena”
- “Students will be able to describe the function of key economic institutions”
- “Students will be able to construct effective messages for diverse audiences”
- Students will be able to locate, interpret, evaluate, and use professional dietetics literature to make evidence-based practice decisions.

(Retrieved from University of Georgia Undergraduate Academic Program SLO Examples)

Writing Knowledge-Based SLOs
When constructing knowledge-based SLOs (i.e., describing what we want graduates of the academic program to know), it may be helpful to consider Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956; Revised by Krathwohl, 2002), presented below. The taxonomy presents hierarchical levels of knowledge ranging from simple (remembering) to complex (creating). Lower levels of knowledge serve as necessary preconditions for higher levels of expertise. Each cognitive ‘level’ is associated with specific demonstrable actions and abilities. Write SLOs with action verbs corresponding to the academic program’s desired level of student performance.

![Bloom's Taxonomy](image-url)
Writing Affective or Value-Based SLOs

When constructing affective or value-based SLOs (i.e., describing what we want graduates of the academic program to value, take interest in, appreciate, feel, etc.), the following classifications may be helpful to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Key Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepting</td>
<td>Demonstrates a willingness to participate in the activity.</td>
<td>Ask, choose, describe, follow, give, hold, identify, locate, name, point to, reply, select, use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Shows interest in objectives, phenomena, or activities by seeking them out.</td>
<td>Answer, Assist, compile, conform, discuss, greet, help, label, perform, practice, present, read, recite, report, select, tell, write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing</td>
<td>Internalizes an appreciation for the objectives, phenomena, or activities.</td>
<td>Complete, describe, differentiate, explain, follow, form, initiate, invite, join, justify, propose, read report, select, share, study work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>Begins to compare different values and resolves conflicts between them to form an internally consistent system of values.</td>
<td>Adhere, alter, arrange, combine, compare, complete, defend, explain, generalize, identify, integrate, modify, order, organize, prepare, relate, synthesize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterizing by Value</td>
<td>Adopts a long-term value system that is pervasive, consistent, and predictable.</td>
<td>Act, discriminate, display, influence, listen, modify, perform, practice, propose, qualify, question, revise, serve, solve, use, verify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from UNC Charlotte’s Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives; UCF Academic Assessment Handbook, Ball State Assessment Workbook)

Writing Skill-Based SLOs

When constructing skill-based SLOs (i.e., describing what we want graduates of the academic program to be able to do), the following classifications (proposed by Simpson, 1972) may be helpful to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Using senses to obtain cues to guide action.</th>
<th>Choose, describe, detect, differentiate, distinguish, identify, isolate, relate, select, separate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set</td>
<td>Readiness to take action.</td>
<td>Begin, display, explain, move, proceed, react, respond, show, start, volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Response</td>
<td>Knowledge of the steps required to perform a task.</td>
<td>Assemble, build, calibrate, construct, dismantle, display, dissect, fasten, fix, grind, manipulate, measure, mend, mix, organize, sketch, work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanism</td>
<td>Performs tasks in a habitual manner, with a degree of confidence and proficiency.</td>
<td>Assemble, build, calibrate, construct, dismantle, display, dissect, fasten, fix, grind, manipulate, measure, mend, mix, organize, sketch, work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complex Overt Response</td>
<td>Skillful performance of tasks involving complex movement patterns.</td>
<td>Assemble, build, calibrate, construct, dismantle, display, dissect, fasten, fix, grind, manipulate, measure, mend, mix, organize, sketch, work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Modifies movement patterns to account for problematic of novel situations.</td>
<td>Adapt, alter, change, rearrange, reorganize, revise, vary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origination</td>
<td>Creates new movement patterns to account for problematic or novel situations; Creates new tasks that incorporate learned ones.</td>
<td>Arrange, combine, compose, construct, design, originate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from UCF Academic Assessment Handbook; Ball State Assessment Workbook)

Common verbs/verb phrases to avoid when writing SLOs
- Appreciate
- Become familiar with
- Become aware of
- Learn
- Know
- Understand
- Demonstrate knowledge
- Demonstrate understanding

These verbs are vague and not measurable, and thus, should not be used to specify SLOs.

FAQ: How many Student Learning Outcomes does my program need to assess?
Most programs assess around three to five SLOs, but this decision is entirely up to program faculty and staff. Each program goal should be assessed with at least one SLO, and SLOs should be representative of the knowledge, values, and skills students should have acquired throughout the course of the academic program.
Developing an Academic Program Assessment Plan: Identify Learning Opportunities through Curriculum Mapping

Curriculum mapping involves relating each program SLO to program courses, co-curricular programs, or other educational opportunities. Curriculum maps take the form of a matrix, with SLOs represented on one axis and program courses or other educational opportunities represented on the other axis.

For each SLO, indicate the course or educational opportunity where the relevant information is Introduced, Reinforced, and Assessed. Note: information related to an SLO may be Introduced, Reinforced, and/or Assessed within a single course or educational opportunity. Below is an example from the University of Hawaii depicting the mapping of an undergraduate program with three separate tracks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track 1</th>
<th>Track 2</th>
<th>Track 3</th>
<th>SLO 1</th>
<th>SLO 2</th>
<th>SLO 3</th>
<th>SLO 4</th>
<th>SLO 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core: CRS 255 (3 credits)</td>
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<td>Core: Three theory courses (9 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core: Writing (3 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core: Design (3 credits)</td>
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<td>CRS 325</td>
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<td>CRS 355</td>
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<td>CRS 405</td>
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<td>CRS 485</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS 495</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In TracDat, curriculum mapping can be completed by navigating to ‘Curriculum Mapping’ underneath the ‘Mapping’ tab. The Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation will upload program course titles to TracDat and assign them to their related academic programs. Program courses and active SLOs will then automatically populate in the Curriculum Mapping area of TracDat. The application then allows users to click ‘I’, ‘A’, and/or ‘R’ to indicate whether a SLO is Introduced, Assessed, or Reinforced in each course, as shown below:

A blank Curriculum Mapping Template word document is accessible via the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation’s website:
http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp
Developing an Academic Program Assessment Plan: Selection of Methods

Selection of assessment methods can only be accomplished after, first, clearly articulating program SLOs and, second, ensuring that the academic program curriculum provides students with learning experiences relevant to the SLOs. Assessment methods should be directly tied to program SLOs and curriculum. Otherwise, the assessment process will fail to produce meaningful data and risks wasting both time and resources.

Types of Assessment Methods
Assessment methods are typically categorized as direct or indirect:

**Direct methods** of assessing student learning call for students to demonstrate their acquired knowledge, values, or skills. Assessment plans should incorporate at least one direct method of assessment for each specified SLO.

**Indirect methods** of assessing student learning measure students’ perceptions of or satisfaction with their learning experience. Indirect methods can support and contextualize direct methods of assessment.

(Bresciani et al., 2009)

The following assessment method inventory lists potential direct and indirect strategies to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Assessment Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Data</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Objective Tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Essay Tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Embedded Questions and/or Assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other Classroom Assessment Techniques (e.g., 1-minute papers, free-writing, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Projects/Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written Products (e.g., term papers, lab reports, critiques)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Oral Presentations (e.g., speeches, role plays)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Poster Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structural/Situational Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summative (End of Program) Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Standardized Tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Locally-Developed Exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Capstone Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Internships/Professional Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Portfolios</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Collaborative Activities | • Research and Group Projects (written and oral)  
| | • Online Group Activities (e.g., records of interactions in discussion forums) |
| **Indirect Assessment Methods** | |
| **Self-Assessment/Reflection** | • Student Journals  
| | • Self-Critiques |
| **Interviews and Surveys** | • Satisfaction Measures (e.g., seniors, alumni, employers, graduate school advisors, parents)  
| | • Performance Reviews (e.g., alumni, employers, graduate school advisors)  
| | • Exit Interviews  
| | • Focus Groups  
| | • Follow-up Alumni Interviews  
| | • External Reviewer Interviews (conducted by objective, external expert) |
| **Archival Measures** | • Transcript Analysis  
| | • Syllabus Audit  
| | • Library or Resource Use Statistics |

(Compiled by the APA Board of Educational Affairs Task Force on Psychology Major Competencies, 2002)

## Tips for Selecting Assessment Methods

- When selecting an assessment method, ask the following questions:
  1. Will the assessment strategy answer questions that are important and meaningful to the program?  
  2. Does the strategy align with the outcome being assessed?  
  3. Is the strategy feasible given available financial resources and time?  
  4. Will the strategy result in useful information about the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

- Use existing information whenever possible: Exams, assignments, or projects in key program courses can be used for program-level assessment if they are consistent across course sections and representative of program requirements.

- Use capstone experiences or senior course assignments: These are typically common to all students completing the program and demonstrate the breadth and depth of students' acquired knowledge and skills.
• Strive to use multiple measures to assess each SLO: This increases confidence that the results through assessment are accurate, consistent, and replicable.

• Don’t reinvent the wheel: Take advantage of published assessment tools in your discipline, such as rubrics or surveys, as opposed to developing your own.

(Adapted from Ball State University Assessment Workbook)

FAQ: Why can’t we use course grades as our program assessment method?
Course grades are useful to evaluate individual students’ performance in a course. Course grades do not demonstrate what, specifically, students have learned (or not learned) from a course and may incorporate additional criteria, such as attendance, participation, and effort, that do not directly reflect learning. Academic program assessment examines patterns of student learning across courses and requires the use of direct measures of learning to identify what students have learned (and not learned) and to drive improvements at the program level.

Setting Benchmarks or Standards for SLOs
Assessment plans should specify a results-oriented standard or benchmark related to each method that indicates the minimum acceptable level of student performance.

There are two general methods of setting performance standards or benchmarks:

1. Student performance in the academic program can be compared to past levels of performance or to a different or broader group of students. Example benchmarks and questions to consider include the following:
   I. Internal Peer Benchmark: How do our students compare to others within UTSA?
   II. External Peer Benchmark: How do our students compare with those of other universities that are similar to UTSA?
   III. Best Practices Benchmark: How do our students compare to the best of their peers?
   IV. Value-Added Benchmark: Are our students improving?
   V. Historical Trends Benchmark: Is our program improving?

2. Students in the academic program can be compared to a specific level of performance. Examples levels and questions to consider include the following:
   I. Local Standards: Are students meeting our own standards?
   II. External Standards: Are students meeting standards set by someone else?
Guidelines to inform benchmark or standard selection:

- Consider how the assessment results will be used: If the purpose of assessment is to improve the academic program, the standard for success for the SLO should be set relatively high.

- Consider the consequences of setting the bar too high or too low: If the bar is set too high, the program may not have the resources available to address all of the identified areas needing improvement. If the bar is set too low, students may graduate the program without acquiring key competencies.

- Consult external sources: Professional standards, potential employers, alumni, peer programs, etc. can all be used to set and justify program standards and benchmarks.

- Set performance levels that represent minimal competence for each dimension on a rubric: Program faculty may have higher expectations for some aspects of an assignment (e.g., grammar and word choice on a research paper) than for others (e.g., effectively integrating information from primary research sources).

- Consider previous assessment results: If student performance has historically been far below the program’s desired benchmark, adjust standards in the short-term to focus on continuous improvement towards the desired, more aggressive benchmark.
Example Assessment Plan

Use the Academic Assessment Plan Template to outline assessment plans for academic programs.

As depicted in the example below, assessment plans should include a description of each SLO, the methods used to assess each SLO, the criteria for success (i.e., the minimal acceptable level of student performance) related to each specified method, and the planned data collection frequency. Documents related to each assessment method (e.g., rubrics, surveys, embedded exam questions, etc.) should also be included, if applicable.

A blank Academic Assessment Plan Template is accessible via the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation’s website: http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome Name</th>
<th>Student Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Data Collection Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composition/Writing</td>
<td>Students will be able to compose multiple-page essays on topics related to health promotion that meet college-level academic standards for content, organization, style, grammar, mechanics, and format.</td>
<td>A rubric that measures various dimensions of writing style and content will be used to evaluate the final research paper in a representative sample of students from upper division courses.</td>
<td>Fall, Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Criterion for Success: At least 75% of students will demonstrate a proficiency (3) or higher on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 1 = Poor) on each rubric dimension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Related Documents: writing_rubric.doc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A rubric that measures the quality of a bibliography including citation style and appropriateness of sources for the topic will be used to evaluate the final research paper in a representative sample of students from upper division courses.</td>
<td>Fall, Spring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criterion for Success: At least 75% of students will demonstrate a proficiency (3) or higher on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 1 = Poor) on each rubric dimension.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Related Documents: writing_rubric.doc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment plans should be finalized and entered into TracDat by **September 1st** of each data collection year.
For assessment results to be used, they first need to be summarized, compared against specified benchmarks and targets, and reported.

Suskie (2009) outlines five basic ways to summarize assessment results:

1. **Tallies**: Take a simple count of the number of students demonstrating a particular type or level of performance. For example, you could tally the number of students who earned a specific rubric rating or selected a specific response on an exam question.

2. **Percentages**: Percentages are typically more meaningful than presenting raw numbers (tallies) and facilitate peer and historical comparisons across different groups of students. For example, you could report the percentage of students who earned a specific rubric rating or selected a specific response on an exam question and examine the percentage change in these values over time.

3. **Aggregates**: In many cases, multiple items on a rubric, exam, or survey relate to a single SLO. In those cases, it is appropriate to report tallies or percentages of students who exhibited a particular type or level of performance across all of the relevant items. For example, perhaps 80% of students correctly responded to the four exam questions targeting understanding of Research Design, but 40% responded correctly to the two questions targeting understanding of Quantitative Analysis.

4. **Averages**: Averages, including the arithmetic mean, median (i.e., the middle score), and mode (i.e., the most frequent response) can be used to summarize the central tendency of assessment results and to compare results to national benchmarks.

5. **Qualitative Summaries**: Qualitative assessment methods (e.g., reflective writing, focus groups, open-ended survey questions) can be analyzed via read-throughs and grouped listings. Read-throughs simply involve quickly reading through qualitative results to get a general sense of common responses. Grouped listings involve separating or tallying qualitative results into common, discrete categories (e.g., perhaps 10% of alumni indicated that performing a group research project was most influential to their learning in the program on an open-ended survey item, whereas 60% mentioned that participating in a practicum experience was most influential).

Use the Academic Assessment Report Template to report academic program assessment results.

A blank Academic Assessment Plan Template is accessible via the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation’s website: [http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp](http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp).
As depicted in the example below, assessment reports should include a description of the sample of students participating in assessment and a summary of the assessment results attained from each method. After the assessment results have been appropriately summarized, they should be compared against the associated benchmark or target.

Then, for each result, make a determination of:

- **“Acceptable”:** The finding meets the minimal acceptable level of student performance.
- **“Needs Improvement”:** The finding does not meet the minimal acceptable level of student performance. Student performance needs to be improved.

**NOTE:** The goal of academic program assessment is to drive continuous improvement. Identifying areas in need of improvement does not constitute ‘failure’ and, on the contrary, is essential to guide forward action and promote positive change. **ACADEMIC PROGRAMS WILL NOT BE JUDGED ON THEIR RESULTS.** However, programs will be evaluated on the extent to which they use assessment results to make meaningful improvements over time.
Fall assessment reports (if required by the college) are due to the colleges by **January 15th** of the data collection year (Year 1 of the two-year assessment cycle). Spring assessment reports are due to the colleges by **June 15th**.
Closing the Loop: Using Assessment Results

Using assessment results effectively is the most challenging, yet most critical, component of the assessment process. Assessment, by itself, does not result in improved student learning. Assessment results, along with professional judgment, must be reflected upon and used to make decisions that result in improved student learning.

Suskie (2009) provides a set of guidelines to ensure that the use of assessment results is fair, ethical, and responsible:

1. Make assessments planned and purposeful: There should be a clear understanding at the outset of why the program is engaging in assessment and the types of decisions that assessment will inform.
2. Focus assessments on important learning goals.
3. Assess teaching and learning processes, not just outcomes, in order to make sense of outcomes.
4. Actively involve those with a stake in decisions stemming from the results in discussions about assessment and use of results.
5. Communicate assessment information widely and transparently.
6. Discourage others from making inappropriate interpretations of assessment results. For example, communicate the limitations of assessment techniques, sampling, and other factors that could affect the accuracy and replicability of the results.
7. Don’t hold people accountable for things that they cannot control.
8. Don’t penalize faculty and staff for disappointing assessment results.
9. Don’t let assessment results alone dictate decisions. Decisions should be based on sound professional judgment.
10. Promote the use of multiple sources of information when making decisions.
11. Keep faculty, students, and staff informed on how assessment findings are being used to inform decisions.

What should be considered when assessment results indicate a ‘need for improvement’?

Assessment results may prompt consideration of changes to the following areas of the academic program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to Curriculum</th>
<th>Changes in teaching practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision/enforcement of prerequisites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of course sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deletion of courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to Academic Processes</th>
<th>Modification of frequency or schedule of course offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvements to technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional training or professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to Assessment Plan</td>
<td>Revision of advising standards or processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of admission criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of SLOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of measurement approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collection of additional data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from UCF Academic Program Assessment Handbook)

What should be considered when results indicate ‘acceptable’ levels of student performance?
First of all, CELEBRATE your program’s success and RECOGNIZE your faculty and staff!

Then, consider setting more challenging goals or targets. Remember, the purpose of assessment is to drive continuous improvement!
Closing the Loop: Documenting the Use of Assessment Results

Use the Use of Results for Improvement Report (pictured below) to summarize assessment results and to identify improvement strategies that the program plans to implement.

A blank Use of Results for Improvement Report is accessible via the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation’s website: [http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp](http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment is a systematic and ongoing method of gathering, analyzing and using information for the purpose of developing and implementing strategies that will help improve student learning outcomes.

In this report you will summarize how your program’s assessment results are being used to implement strategies to improve student learning outcomes.

1. Summarize trends in assessment results over the past year.

2. List improvement strategies that will be implemented as a result of assessment findings.

Please list the names of those involved in this discussion and the date(s) of any meetings:

The Use of Results for Improvement (URI) form is due for entry into TracDat by **November 1st** of the implementation year (Year 2 of the two-year assessment cycle).
Use the Implementation of Improvements Status Report (example below) to describe the progress made in implementing the identified improvement strategies.


---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program: B.S. Business Analytics</th>
<th>Date: June 15, 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current status of efforts to implement the improvement strategies identified in the Use of Results for Improvement Reports. Identify improvement strategies in addition to those identified through assessment of learning activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Description of Progress Made</th>
<th>Faculty Member Accountable</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop real world projects for different topics in BAN 4103.</td>
<td>Developed projects for students with real data and compared case studies at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. Also developed real world business cases in the areas of operations and global supply chain management which utilize high level of analytical skills, critical thinking, and teamwork.</td>
<td>Mark Wilson</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include research process projects for students in several upper division business analytics courses.</td>
<td>Added research process projects to courses where students formulated their own research question and sharpened their research skills in order to develop their professional opinions.</td>
<td>Sabrina Ollivarez</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine the lecture notes and teaching methods to develop lot acceptance concepts in BAN 4213 and BAN 4423.</td>
<td>Added enhanced lesson materials related to quality control and inspection acceptance limits to BAN 4213 and BAN 4423.</td>
<td>Luis Estrada Rohit Rao</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce more industry speakers to selected upper division classes.</td>
<td>Speakers made presentations in Service Operations and Supply Chain Management courses and gave the audience a “dose of reality.”</td>
<td>Mark Wilson</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide additional support to develop student communication skills.</td>
<td>Included more written reports and memoranda explaining results of analyses in support of making proper business recommendations in BAN 4223 and BAN 4253.</td>
<td>Ray Avery Samantha Driscoll</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For foundation course provide more reviews of materials from prerequisites courses.</td>
<td>Included reviews for the CBK courses to provide leveling.</td>
<td>Ray Avery</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fall Implementation of Improvements Status Report (IISR; if required by the college), is due by **January 15th** of the implementation year (Year 2 of the two-year assessment cycle). The spring IISR is due to the colleges by **June 15th** of the implementation year.