The University of Texas at San Antonio
Administrative Assessment Handbook

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Introduction to Administrative 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, administrative unit or institutional levels. This handbook focuses on the assessment of operational outcomes at the administrative unit level.

Administrative assessment addresses the following questions:

- **What are we trying to do?** Start by clearly defining the unit's mission, goals, and desired outcomes.
- **How well are we doing it?** Systematically gather, analyze, and interpret evidence to determine whether the unit's performance matches expectations.
- **How can we improve what we're doing?** Use the resulting information to understand and improve operations, programs, and services.

 (Adapted Hutchings & Marchese, 1990)

Why Participate in Assessment?

Administrative assessment provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of student and administrative support services and guides the implementation of changes to improve quality and customer satisfaction.

The main purposes of program assessment are as follows:

1. **To inform:** the assessment process should reveal the contributions of the administrative unit to the institution.
2. **To improve:** the assessment process should produce information regarding how to improve administrative and support services.
3. **To prove:** the assessment process should demonstrate what the administrative unit 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 administrative unit level.

(Adapted from UCF Administrative Assessment Handbook)

Assessment benefits administrators and staff by:

- Clarifying the purpose and key functions of an administrative unit and its role in supporting the mission and goals of the institution.

- Providing coherence and direction to the unit's work.
- Providing personnel with clear expectations for their work.
- Providing administrators and staff with information about how their functions and services are used and perceived by their customers or stakeholders.
- Providing data to support administrators' decisions regarding improvements or changes to services.
- Providing data to guide budgeting and resource allocation.

(Adapted from The American University of Cairo Assessment Guide)

All Administrative units (i.e., offices, programs, centers, and institutes) 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 7.3 of the 2018 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation outlines specific assessment requirements for administrative support services:

> *"The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved."*

Section 8.2 of the 2018 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation outlines specific assessment requirements for academic and student support services:

> *"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:*
>
> *c. Academic and student services that support student success"*

In addition, UTSA outlines institution-specific requirements for administrative unit assessment in Section 9.45 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures: http://www.utsa.edu/hop/chapter9/9-45.html.

Overview of Administrative Assessment at UTSA

Administrative assessment at UTSA begins with the definition of formal, systematic assessment plans for each unit. Assessment plans include a formal mission statement, goals representing the unit's long-term desired achievements, measurable outcomes related to each goal, planned methods of assessing each 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 component of the assessment plan.

Assessment Cycle

All administrative units participate in an annual assessment cycle, depicted below.
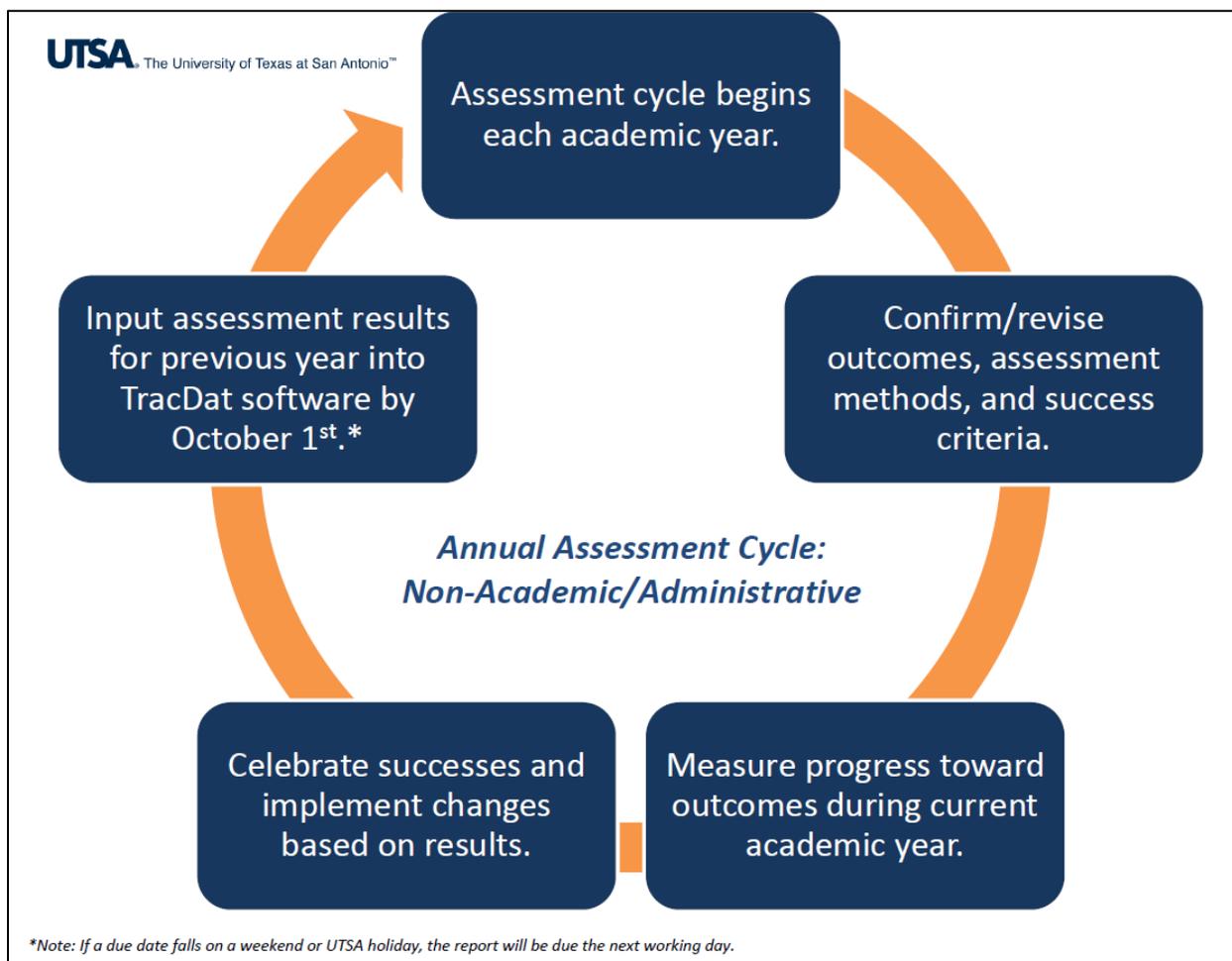
Each year, administrative units conduct assessment activities in accordance with their assessment plan, implement changes based on the assessment results, and report both the assessment results and implemented changes for the past academic year by **October 1ˢᵗ**.

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 Administrative units: 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.

Developing an Administrative Assessment Plan: Specifying Unit Mission and Goals

How do you develop a mission statement?

Mission statements enable the administrative unit to define their purpose within the context of the greater institutional mission. The unit's mission statement should effectively communicate to internal and external stakeholders the key functions of the unit and how it contributes to the institution. To develop a mission statement, encourage personnel to discuss the following questions:

- What is your primary purpose? Discuss why you do what you do.
- Who do you primarily serve? Discuss who your key stakeholders are (e.g., students, faculty, staff, etc.).
- What are the most important functions or services that you provide?
- How do you support the institution's mission?

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

Example Mission Statements

- **Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation:** *"To lead institutional accreditation and assessment activities in support of the University's mission through continuous improvement of processes, programs, and services."*
- **Office of Institutional Research:** *"To provide the highest quality of institutional research to advance the university's mission through collection and reporting of institutional data, research, and data analysis, and the support of institutional effectiveness related to: access and excellence in higher education in south Texas; research and discovery, teaching and learning, and public service; embracing of multicultural traditions of South Texas; serving as a center of intellectual and creative resources; and being a catalyst for the economic development of Texas."*
- **Student Health Services:** *"To provide quality medical care and innovative health education to empower and support student success."*
- **Career Center:** *"To assist students and alumni in identifying and developing the global skills necessary to successfully pursue and achieve lifelong career goals."*

How do you develop unit goals?

Successful administrative assessment depends upon the determination of shared goals.

'Goals' can be defined in several ways. This handbook focuses on the development of goals at the administrative unit level, which describe in broad terms what the unit hopes to accomplish over the next several years. Goals should align with the unit's mission statement, as well as with relevant VP- and

institutional-level goals. Unit goals do not have to be directly measurable (this will be achieved when goals are 'broken down' into specific related outcomes) and may be aspirational.

Shared goals provide the foundation for the unit's activities and guide the selection of questions to address via assessment. The following activities can facilitate the definition of shared goals.

Engage personnel in the following discussions:

- What are the most important functions or services that your unit provides?
- How does the university operate more efficiently as a result of your service?
- How does the university support students more effectively as a result of your service?
- How does the university benefit from using your service?
- If your unit was operating at its highest possible level, what would happen?
- If your unit was operating at its highest possible level, what would *not* happen?

Collect and review current unit descriptions and institutional materials. These may come from:
- Web or brochure descriptions.
- Mission and vision statements.
- External accreditation agencies.
- VP-level strategic plans.
- Institutional strategic plans.

Review other units' goals
- What are the goals of related units at the university?
- What are the goals of similar units at other universities?

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

Example Goals

- "To provide timely and accurate information via regular and ad hoc reporting of institutional data to internal and external audiences."
- "To attract external funding from public and private sources to initiate and sustain large-scale research projects and support the initiation of students into the research community."
- "To enhance community ties by hosting or supporting music performances, artistic exhibitions, and athletic events that build community support and alumni loyalty."
- "To protect, promote, and advance the UTSA brand through strategic messaging, compelling storytelling, and creative integrated marketing solutions."

Developing an Administrative Assessment Plan: Specifying Unit Outcomes

What are Administrative Outcomes?

Administrative outcomes are specific, measurable statements describing the desired end-result and quality (e.g., timeliness, accuracy, responsiveness, frequency, etc) of the key functions and services of the administrative unit. Outcomes should be directly related to the mission and goals of the unit. Administrative units may specify operational outcomes, which focus on the impact of their functions and services to their customers, strategic outcomes, which focus on the future plans of the unit, and/or student learning outcomes, which focus on the development of students' knowledge, values, or skills. For information regarding how to develop student learning outcomes, visit the Academic Program Assessment main page: http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/Academic_Programs.asp

(Adapted from UCF Administrative Assessment Handbook; Marymount Administrative Assessment Guide)

Outcomes should be SMART (Doran, 1981):

Specific

- Stated in definite language, outcomes should describe the specific functions and services provided to customers or stakeholders.

Measurable

- Data related to the outcome 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, units should determine an assessable criterion for success or benchmark for the outcome that will progressively move the unit closer to achieving its goals.

Results-oriented and Time-bound

- Outcomes should specify what the expected level of unit performance should be after a finite period of time (e.g., 5% improvement in customer satisfaction rates in the next year). These specifications may be based on experience, previous assessment results, external requirements, local, state, or national benchmarks, etc.

Example Outcomes

The following table, retrieved from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Office of Accreditation and Assessment, provides examples for translating key functions and services into measurable outcomes.

Things your unit does:	What to measure:	Where to get data:	How to write relevant expected outcome statements:
• Provide services to faculty, staff, students: **Law Enforcement, Emergency Preparedness, Contracting (Goods & Services) Professional Development, Benefits Enrollment Vehicle Assistance, Lost and Found, Employee on-boarding, Policy Compliance Hot-line, Customized Training Sessions etc.**	○ Service satisfaction ○ Service frequency ○ Service responsiveness ○ Service efficiency ○ Service use by target population ○ Service quality ○ Service effectiveness aimed at changing behavior, enhancing skills, promoting welfare, instilling certain values, improving knowledge	○ Surveys, focus groups ○ Faculty/Staff comments or reflections ○ Unit records of timing and frequency of services requested and/or services rendered ○ Crime Statistics. ○ Compliance Statistics ○ Scores/Results from training quizzes or certification exams	○ Increase satisfaction with services. ○ Improve timeliness of service delivery ○ Provide extensive services to univ. community ○ Faculty/Staff will feel adequately prepared respond to emergency situations ○ Faculty/Staff will demonstrate safe practices in classroom, laboratory & other environments ○ The unit will reduce potential risk factors in university facilities ○ The unit will ensure proper procedures for new hires ○ The unit will increase participation in professional development opportunities
• Develop marketing and informational materials: **Websites, Handbooks, Brochures, Operating Procedures, Emergency Plans, Announcements, Training Manuals, etc.**	○ Accessibility of marketing information ○ Quality of informational material (easy to understand) ○ Knowledge about informational material or unit functions/services ○ Participant attendance ○ Requests for services	○ Surveys, focus groups ○ Student reflections or comments ○ Unit records on website analytics ○ Quizzes, tests ○ Unit records of attendance or requests for services	○ Improve accessibility to information about unit's services ○ Increase knowledge of institutional policies and services provided by unit ○ Increase quality of informational materials ○ Increase visits to website ○ Increase use of electronic means to engage with use services (Online portals for trainings, reporting, etc.) ○ Reduce/eliminate instances of non-compliant unapproved behavior/actions
• Provide or develop: **Programs, Initiatives, Workshops, Events Trainings, etc.**	○ Program Quality ○ Program Participation Attendance ○ Program Frequency ○ Program Effectiveness aimed at faculty/staff behavior, skills, values, knowledge	○ Surveys, focus group discussions ○ Unit records of program attendance ○ Unit records of programs provided ○ Assignments, exercises, simulations, quizzes ○ Certifications	○ Increase the quality of programs. ○ Increase staff, faculty, and student participation/attendance ○ Provide extensive programs/services to faculty/staff ○ Enhance the program's effectiveness (for whatever program is intended to do) ○ Increase knowledge regarding values and practices promoted by program, training, or event

FAQ: How many outcomes does my unit need to assess?

This decision is entirely up to unit administrators and staff. Each goal should be assessed with at least one outcome and corresponding assessment method, and goals should be representative of the key functions and services of the unit.

Developing an Administrative Assessment Plan: Selection of Methods

Assessment methods indicate how the administrative unit plans to collect data related to each outcome. Methods should logically align with the outcome in question and should also be reliable (i.e., produce replicable results), useful, and efficient.

Types of Assessment Methods

Assessment methods are typically categorized as direct or indirect:

Direct methods of assessing operational or strategic outcomes include measurements of the demand, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of key functions and services.

Direct administrative assessment methods include, but are not limited to:

- Number of complaints
- Number of errors; error rate
- Number/percentage change of applications
- Number/percentage change of users
- Number of training sessions
- Growth in attendance
- Number/amount/percentage increase of donations
- Number of new alumni donors
- Timeliness of response
- Level of compliance
- Average service time
- Average wait time
- Auditor's findings
- Pre- and post-workshop tests

Indirect methods of assessing operational or strategic outcomes include measurements of customers' *perceptions of* or *satisfaction with* key functions and services. Indirect methods can support and contextualize direct methods of assessment.

Indirect administrative assessment methods include, but are not limited to:

- Satisfaction surveys
- Participant feedback
- Staff training hours
- Focus groups
- Opinion surveys
- Awareness surveys

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 unit?
  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 unit?

- Use existing information whenever possible.

- Strive to use multiple measures to assess each outcome: 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 area, such as rubrics or surveys, as opposed to developing your own.

(Adapted from Ball State University Assessment Workbook)

Setting Benchmarks or Standards for Administrative Outcomes

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

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

1. Unit performance can be compared to past levels of performance or to the performance of another group. Example benchmarks and questions to consider include the following:
   - I. External Peer Benchmark: How does our unit performance compare to that of similar units at other institutions?
   - II. Best Practices Benchmark: How does our unit performance compare to the best practices in our field?
   - III. Value-Added Benchmark: Is the institution improving as a result of our performance?
   - IV. Historical Trends Benchmark: Is our performance improving?

2. Unit performance can be compared to a specific level of performance. Examples levels and questions to consider include the following:
    I. Local Standards: Are we meeting our own standards?
    II. External Standards: Are we meeting standards set by someone else?

(Adapted from Texas Tech University Program Assessment Handbook; Ball State University Assessment Workbook; Suskie, 2009)

Guidelines to inform benchmark or standard selection:

- Consider how the assessment results will be used: If the purpose of assessment is to improve the unit, the standard for success for each outcome 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 unit may not have the resources available to address all of the identified areas needing improvement. If the bar is set too low, the unit risks not performing essential functions and services.

- Consult external sources: Professional standards, external requirements, etc. can all be used to set and justify unit standards and benchmarks.

- Consider previous assessment results: If unit performance has historically been below the desired benchmark, adjust standards in the short-term to focus on continuous improvement towards the desired, more aggressive benchmark.

(Adapted from Suskie, 2015)

Closing the Loop: Reporting Assessment Results

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 results related to the unit's outcome. For example, units could tally the number of service requests completed, the number of errors made, the number of trainings delivered, etc.

2. **Percentages**: Percentages are typically more meaningful than presenting raw numbers (tallies) and facilitate historical comparisons. For example, units could report the percentage of customers who indicated that a particular service met their needs this year compared to last year.

3. **Aggregates**: Often, multiple items on a survey or instrument relate to a single outcome. In those cases, it is appropriate to report tallies or percentages across all relevant items. For example, perhaps 80% of workshop participants indicated high levels of satisfaction on survey items related to the content of the workshop, but only 40% indicated high levels of satisfaction on survey items related to the setting of the workshop.

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., 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 categorizes (for example, perhaps 60% of customers commented on the speed of service, whereas 20% commented on the quality of service).

After data has been collected, compare the results to the set criterion for success or target. Then, for each result, make a determination of:

- **"Acceptable"**: The finding meets the minimal acceptable level of unit performance.
<div align="center">OR</div>
- **"Needs Improvement"**: The finding does not meet the minimal acceptable level of unit performance. Unit performance needs to be improved.

NOTE: The goal of administrative 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. <u>AREAS WILL NOT BE JUDGED ON THEIR RESULTS</u>. However, units

will be evaluated on the extent to which they use assessment results to make meaningful improvements over time.

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 improvements to functions and services. Assessment results, along with professional judgment, must be reflected upon and *used* to make decisions that result in improvements.

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 unit is engaging in assessment and the types of decisions that assessment will inform.
2. Focus assessments on important goals.
3. Assess unit 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 personnel accountable for things that they cannot control.
8. Don't penalize personnel 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 personnel informed on how assessment findings are being used to inform decisions.

What to do when assessment results indicate a 'need for improvement'

The unit should reflect on what they learned through the assessment process and report actions they plan to take to improve relevant functions and services. Actions should directly relate to the reported outcomes and be clear, logical, and feasible. Possible actions to report include planned modifications of service offerings, improvements to technology, changes in unit personnel or roles, additions to trainings or professional development resources, revisions to unit standards or processes, improvements to communications or marketing, etc. The unit may also report planned modifications to their assessment plan, including revisions to outcomes, assessment methods, or criteria for success.

What to do when results indicate 'acceptable' levels of performance
First of all, CELEBRATE your unit's success and RECOGNIZE your personnel!

Then, consider setting more challenging goals or targets, or changing the unit's assessment plan to focus on new outcomes. Remember, the purpose of assessment is to drive continuous improvement!

FAQ: Do we need to report Actions for 'Acceptable' results?

Yes, there should be an action in TracDat associated with each reported result. Actions for 'acceptable' results might include revisions to goals or targets, discontinuation of assessment for an outcome with consistently acceptable results, or plans to continue monitoring the outcome to ensure that performance remains acceptable over time.

Administrative Assessment Report Form

Use the Administrative Assessment Report Template to report assessment plans, results, and actions..

A blank Administrative Assessment Report Template is accessible via the Office of Continuous Improvement and Accreditation's website:
http://provost.utsa.edu/vpie/assessment/AdministrativePrograms.asp

Assessment reports for the academic year are due into TracDat by the following **October 1st**.

Assessment Report
[Enter Department/Unit Name]

Coordinator:	
E-mail:	
Phone:	

Department/Unit Mission Statement:

Department/Unit Goals:
1.
2.
3.

	Outcome	Outcome Type	Goal	Assessment Method	Criterion	Results*	Action Plan*
	Describe the intended result – should be specific and measurable.	*Operational or Student Learning?*	*Links to which goal above?*	*How will the outcome be measured? Directly or indirectly? Can have multiple measures.*	*What is your desired standard/target for success?*	*What were the actual, measured results?*	*What do the results mean? What improvements should be implemented?*
1							
2							
3	[add rows for additional outcomes as needed]						

*Final two columns to be completed at the end of the annual assessment cycle and entered into TracDat by October 1.   The University of Texas at San Antonio