Texas A&M International University

Assessment Quick Guide

Academic Programs, 2018-2019

The Assessment Process

The Assessment Process is divided into five essential steps: planning, data collection, data analysis, reporting, and use of results for improvement. Each phase of the process includes **all program faculty** in assessment efforts and ensures everyone understands his/her role. The assessment process allows programs to 1) identify which program learning outcomes (PLOs) will be assessed this academic year, 2) determine how and when those PLOs will be assessed, 3) assign responsibility to faculty for data collection, 4) analyze the data, and 5) determine what improvements need to be made.

Below is a brief guide outlining the steps to completing the assessment process:

Program Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are a formal statement of what students are expected to learn in a degree program. Program learning outcome statements refer to specific knowledge, practical skills, areas of professional development, attitudes, higher-order thinking skills, etc. that faculty members and administrators expect students to develop, learn, or master during a degree program. Simply stated PLOs describe what students should *know* AND *be able to do* at the end of their degree program.

A Good PLO is:	Aligned with the program's mission
	Focused on student learning, NOT teaching
	Stated in clear and precise language
	Measurable and attainable

Learning Outcome Formula: Who + Action Verb + What (desired learning outcome)

Clear, measurable PLO	Graduates of the program will be able to summarize the major theories of human development.
Ambiguous, not measurable PLO	Graduates of the program should understand basic human development theory.

Measures

Assessment is the process of measuring and evaluating *what* students are learning and *how well* they are learning it in relation to the PLOs. A **measure** answers the question: How do we document that graduates know and can do what are stated in the program outcomes? The measure provides meaningful, actionable data.

Direct measures require students to display their actual knowledge and skills (rather than report what they *think* their knowledge and skills are). Some examples include:

- Course Assignments
- Capstone/Senior Projects
- Case Studies
- Rubrics
- Comprehensive Exams

Indirect measures capture information about students' perceptions or attitudes towards the learning experience or process, rather than to actually demonstrate it. Some examples include:

- Alumni, Employer, or Student Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Job Placement Statistics
- Graduate Exit Survey
- Graduation/Retention Rates

*Indirect measures alone do not provide adequate evidence of student learning and should be used in conjunction with direct measures of learning.

Benchmarks

Benchmarks, or targets, state the level of performance expected of students. Each benchmark is the minimally acceptable level of performance for a program-level outcome. Some people worry they are creating a legal promise that every student will have certain skills when they graduate. Setting assessment targets does not promise any particular outcome to any individual student.

Example of an Acceptable Benchmark:	80% of graduating seniors will score a 3 or higher on the 'Focus & Organization' criteria of the WIN Rubric.

Assignment of Data Collection Responsibilities

In order to make the assessment planning process smooth and effective, it is important to identify who is responsible for the administration of assessment instruments and collection of assessment data. The goal is identify a reasonably representative group of program majors in your data collection. The planning template allows programs to identify 1) where the assessment will take place, 2) when the assessment will take place, and 3) the individual responsible for data collection. Please note the assignments should vary between different capstone courses, assignments, and professors. All data should not come from one source.

Data Collection

The on-going collection of qualitative and quantitative data allows academic programs to gain a better understanding of areas where improved could occur. Data collection consists of results, or findings, from the direct and/or indirect measures conducted throughout the assessment process. Remember that we are drawing inferences for program graduates only. Do not include students enrolled in a course used for data collection if they are not majors in the program being assessed. Program majors included in your sample may or may not be students who will graduate in current academic year. It is unlikely that you will know in advance the number of students for whom you will have data.

Data Analysis & Reporting

Data Analysis allows programs to 1) determine whether or not students met the benchmark, 2) make necessary improvements as a result of the new information, and 3) identify themes and trends in program assessment. It is recommended that degree programs incorporate the analysis of all assessment data as a routine part of departmental functioning. The data gathered for each PLO should be analyzed and evaluated either on a semester or annual basis.

Analysis of assessment data should help departments identify the following:

- What students are learning in relation to each program learning outcome
- How well students are learning the material that relates to these outcomes
- How well the selected assessment measure(s) reflect program learning outcomes
- Areas for more focused assessment
- Ways that learning outcomes may need to be revised
- Areas that may need to be investigated in the next phase of assessment

Use of Results for Improvement

The use of results for improvement may be one of the most significant aspects of the assessment phase. It involves program faculty working together in closely examining the results to improve the quality of students' experiences and learning. It is important to learn from the assessment results to "close the loop" rather than simply maintaining the benchmark or criterion. There is no one, right way to use information for decision making; as long as you're collecting data and using the findings to inform next steps, then you're on the right path. Some examples changes you might think about using assessment information are **teaching approaches, curriculum changes,** and/or **change assessment processes.**