Academic Program Assessment Handbook
Florida Memorial University

2014-2015
Office of Institutional Effectiveness
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The purpose of this handbook is to provide academic programs with a framework for developing an assessment plan with the objective of improving an academic program. **The primary purpose of program assessment is to improve the quality of educational programs by improving student learning.** Even if you feel that the quality of your program is good, there is always room for improvement. In addition, various accrediting bodies mandate conducting student outcomes assessment. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) require that every program assess its student outcomes and uses the results to improve programs. Not to conduct assessment is not an option.

The primary purpose of assessment is to identify the important objectives and learning outcomes for your program with the purpose of improving student learning. Anything that enhances and improves the learning, knowledge and growth of your students cannot be considered a waste of time. For program assessment to be successful, it must be an ongoing and continuous process. Just as your program should be improving, so should your assessment plan and measurement methods. Each academic department must look at its programs and its learning outcomes on a continual basis and determine if there are better ways to measure student learning and other program outcomes. Your assessment plan should he continuously reviewed and improved.

**Program Assessment**
The overall purpose of program assessment does not focus on an individual student. Rather, the emphasis is on what and how an educational program is contributing to the learning, growth and development of students as a group. There are four levels of assessment:

1. **Classroom assessment** (involves assessment of individual students at the course level typically by the class instructor),
2. **Course assessment** (involves assessment of a specific course),
3. **Program assessment** (involves assessment of academic and support programs and is the focus of this manual), and
4. **Institutional Assessment** (involves assessment of campus-wide characteristics and issues) otherwise known as Institutional Effectiveness

Program assessment is defined as the systematic and ongoing method of gathering, analyzing and using information from various sources about a program and measuring program outcomes in order to improve student learning.
This is done through obtaining a good understanding of what the programs’ graduates know, what they can do with this knowledge, and what they value as a result of this knowledge. Program assessment, as it is addressed in this manual, can also be called student outcomes assessment, which places an emphasis on the learning, development and growth of students.

**Purposes of program assessment**

The four main purposes of program assessment are:

1. **To improve** - the assessment process should provide feedback to determine how the program can be improved.
2. **To inform** - the assessment process should inform faculty and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the program.
3. **To prove** - the assessment process should encapsulate and demonstrate to students, faculty, staff and outsiders what the program is accomplishing.
4. **To support** - the assessment process should provide support for campus decision-making activities such as program review and strategic planning, as well as external accountability activities such as accreditation.

**Characteristics of effective program assessment**

Effective program assessment should answer these questions:

1. What are you trying to do?
2. How well are you doing it?
3. Using the answers to the first two questions, how can you improve what you are doing?
4. What and how does a program contribute to the development and growth of its students?
5. How can student learning be improved?

Additionally, program assessment is effective when:

1. Assessment is viewed as a comprehensive, systematic and continuous process.
2. Assessment is viewed as a means for self-improvement.
3. Assessment measures are meaningful.
4. Assessment utilizes multiple measures and multiple sources.
5. Assessment is used as a management tool.

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6. Assessment **results** are **valued** and are genuinely **used to improve** programs and processes.
7. Assessment involves the **participation and input of all faculty, administration and staff**.
8. Assessment **includes students**.

The nine principles include:
1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational communities are involved.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

8. Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

**Introduction to developing an assessment plan**

A crucial part of developing an assessment plan is to clarify the focus and content of your plan, this should be based on the needs of your program or unit. The assessment approach will depend on your program's mission or purpose. Remember that the purpose of assessment can be to **improve**, **inform**, and/or **support** your program. Thinking of assessment in these terms will help you identify your need (which is the first phase) as well as help you in devising the assessment plan. Depending on the purpose of assessment, the plan can be an informal document to be internally distributed, or it can be a formal document with an external audience.

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Mission Statement
Start by looking at your Mission Statement

Define the mission of the program.
The program mission is a broad statement of the directions, values and aspirations of the department with regard to its programs. It should provide a clear description of the purpose of the program and the learning environment. The mission should be aligned with the Department, School, and University's mission

1. Each Department should get together to discuss your Mission Statement and see if your Mission "fits" what you want to achieve in your degree program.
2. HOW DO YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO LOOK WHEN THEY GRADUATE?
3. Make notes and keep records. Include your notes in your reports.

- A mission statement articulates the purpose of a unit or program. The mission statement declares what the unit or program does and what it intends to achieve. Often a mission statement carries an implicit statement of the values the program espouses, as well as the relationship the unit or program has to the institution as a whole.
- The mission statement for a single unit or academic program is often a simple assertion, articulated by those most closely involved with the unit or program and accepted by those who have responsibility for oversight of that unit or program
- An academic program mission statement should identify what the program will help students and others learn and do within a particular context and state how the program contributes to its wider communities.
- A mission statement should be specific, identifying the important things a unit or program does that separates it from others. Consider how each of the following general statements defines the program or unit and gives direction to its work.

Examples of Mission Statements
- Poor: "The XYZ program provides exemplary education and service for students and the local community"

- Better: "The XYZ program designs and delivers both theoretical and practical educational experiences in [specific areas] to develop graduates with the knowledge and skills expected of professionals in the..."
Goals

Define the goals of the program:
The goals of a program or unit must concur with those of the school or college, and ultimately with the goals of the institution. Program goals provide the basis for assessment and therefore should be defined adequately and clearly.

- Before identifying the specific outcomes/objectives, it may be useful for the unit or program to identify goals that will work to achieve desired outcomes. These are broad statements about the desired ends to which a unit or program aspires.
- Goals are usually too general to actually guide assessment practice, but they can provide a bridge between the mission/purpose statement and the outcomes/objectives that specify the most important work of the unit or program.
- Goals are less precise than clearly measurable outcomes/objectives.
- Goals for student learning might include such broad general education ends as critical thinking and enhanced communication skills, while administrative goals might include such broad intentions as improve quality, increase efficiency, and establish a positive climate for student development.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Define the intended student learning outcomes of the program:
Program goals are general while program outcomes are more specific and reflect the broader goals. The learning outcomes of a program describe the intended educational outcomes in terms of specific abilities, knowledge, values and attitudes that you want students in your program to possess.

- The unit/degree program will develop SLO(s) that will be measured throughout the program. In other words, a SLO(s) will be identified by the unit that is part of the Core Curriculum of the degree program. These SLO(s) will be a component that will appear in various guises in different core classes the unit offers (Imbedded Assessment). The students should be assessed on how well they master these SLO(s) from the beginning of their studies to end. The culmination of this assessment will be in a Capstone Class.
• Each Unit should develop 7-10 SLOs which can be rotated from year to year.
  • Student learning outcomes identify knowledge, skills, and abilities students should gain or improve through engagement in an academic program or other learning experience. Student learning outcomes are typically the most important outcomes for an academic program.
  • Historically, many faculty members have not been asked to identify learning outcomes, except as they applied to individual courses. The development of student learning outcomes for a program requires faculty discussion and clarifies for both the program's faculty and its students what characteristics are expected in those who finish the program. Student learning outcomes also should be SMART: Specific, Measurable and verifiable, Agreed upon, Realistic and yet rigorous, and Time-bound.
  • In some instances, student learning outcomes may be expressed in a manner that identifies how the knowledge and skills are expected to develop over the course of the program. Some professional accrediting bodies, for example, require the identification of skills expected of entering students and again at identified places as those students progress through a curriculum.

Writing SLOs

• In writing student learning outcomes, it is helpful to begin by saying "Students (or program completers) will (or will be able to) .. .. " You should use action verbs to describe what students will know and be able to do (e.g., Graduating students in XYZ will be able to identify complex problems during their final internships and then make appropriate referrals to existing community services).

• The key to a good outcome/objective statement is the verb. However, some verbs that are linked to learning, such as understand or know, are poor choices in an outcome/objective statement. Instead you should select verbs that focus on observable and measurable action, such as describe or demonstrate. Blooms Taxonomy of Action Verbs is a great place to find the correct verb to use. Using an Internet search engine, you can easily find various lists of "action verbs for learning."

• Good outcome statements lead directly to identifying relevant measures for gauging the program's success in producing program completers that display expected characteristics.

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How to Write Student Learning Outcomes (from the University of Kansas)

Instructions for Writing Student Learning Outcomes

- Creating student learning outcomes for your degree or service program is a process. Some programs have found the following steps to be helpful:

**Step 1**
- Start by having a faculty/staff meeting (including students and alumni, ideally) and brainstorm about what an ideal graduate would know, understand, and be able to do ... and/or Consult the web site for your professional/disciplinary organization - many of them are developing student learning outcomes for degree or service programs at various levels.

**Step 2**
- Agree on a first draft of a list of outcomes, understanding that they will be revised several times before becoming firm (or definitive) and that they will change over time for currency in the discipline or service area and changing needs and characteristics of students.

**Step 3**
- List the student learning outcomes on every syllabus for the required courses in your degree program (or programs within your student service area), indicating which of them will be covered in each particular course (or service program).

**Step 4**
- Gather feedback from students in each course or service program about how well they perceive that student learning outcomes were addressed.

**Step 5**
- Assess student learning by designing assignments specifically geared to measure achievement of each of the outcomes that are designated for each course, degree program, or service area.

**Step 6**
- In light of this data, meet (with faculty, staff, and students) at the end of each semester or academic year and revise the list of outcomes, teaching methods, curriculum, and/or program.

**Step 7**
- Repeat the above steps regularly and as needed to improve student learning.

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Assessment should be based on **Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)** and should be explicitly defined in the **Goals and Objectives** of each School and Department and further reinforced in the syllabi for each course. If a department does not have a good set of goals and objectives, a good place to start is with the national accrediting body for their discipline. Each of these Goals and Objectives must have **Measurable** and **Achievable** results with a timeline associated with each result. If these results are not met, there also needs to be a well-thought out **Action Plan** to achieve the desired SLO in the future.

**Means/Tools of Assessment**

For each SLO a type of assessment tool must be developed - this is how you will measure your results. There are several ways you can assess a SLO. These include:

- Rubric
- Academic Direct Evaluation
- Senior Capstone course activities/projects
- Comprehensive Exam
- Thesis Project
- Research Report Internship Evaluation, Field Work Evaluation - using a rubric to evaluate
  - Written Exam or Written Assignment
  - Standard Exam

Course embedded assessments: **

- specific test questions
- a focused project graded for a specific outcome
- a research paper, essay or other writing project

**For courses taught in various formats, or among several faculty members - the embedded pieces should be common to all.**

- National Surveys: NSSE, CIRP etc. or internal
- Professional Licensure Exam - such as a State Teacher Exam
- Pre/Post Test
- Portfolios

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- Life Experience Credit/Outside expert reviewers (of papers or presentations)/Professional advisory group
- Performance/Project/Presentation/Exhibits such as a musical recital or gallery display of art work.
- Exit Survey/Interview, Satisfaction Survey
- Simulations/Use of rubrics to evaluate specific outcomes
- Graduate School Placement
- Alumni/Employer surveys or interviews/Placement Data
- Analysis of transcript data/Transfer Students
- Video/Audio Presentation
- Benchmarking
- Curriculum
- Student Evaluations of Faculty
- Academic Indirect
- Other

The most common method of assessment is a **rubric**.

A **rubric** is a scoring guide composed of criteria used to evaluate performance, a product, or a project. A rubric allows for standardized evaluation according to specified criteria, making grading and ranking simpler and more transparent in a reliable, fair, and valid manner at several levels.

The best place to find rubrics is: [http://www.rcampus.com/index.cfm](http://www.rcampus.com/index.cfm).

RCAMPUS contains thousands of rubrics ready for use. Each member of the faculty should have an account.

All so The American Association of Colleges and Universities as a great set of value rubrics: [http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics](http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics)

**Achievement Target**

You should have an achievement target of each SLO, *i.e. 80% of students will be able to ... with 80% mastery*

**Collect the data**

After the plan has been developed, you must implement the plan. It is important to determine how the data will be collected, who will collect the data, and where and how the data will be archived.

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**Action Plan**

For assessment measures *not met* the department must come up with a plan to improve results of SLO's during the next assessment cycle. The Department may also decide that the SLO's need to be adjusted or reevaluated because of unrealistic expectations. You can stipulate what actions you will take and budget, if needed, to improve your plan.

**Use of Results**

The results of the assessment must be used to identify changes to improve the program. These changes could be to the content of the curriculum, staffing, facilities, among others. At this point in the continuous improvement cycle, the planned changes should be implemented and then assessed the next assessment cycle. In some cases, the changes are easy to implement, while in other instances the proposed changes will have to be implemented over a period of time or through a series of steps.

**Develop plan to monitor the changes and compare the results.**

The implemented changes should be monitored to determine whether or not the changes had the desired effect. One way of achieving this is to use the same assessment plan as used in the previous cycle and compare the actual results to the intended results. Any discrepancies should be carefully studied to determine the underlying cause. In other situations, when the outcomes have been met, the action might be to continue monitoring the outcome to ensure quality. You could define another outcome to begin monitoring.

**Review information**

Review all of the information obtained from the assessment process and determine how this will affect your next assessment plan. This provides the starting point for the next iteration of the plan and leads to continuous improvement of the academic program.
FLOW CHART FOR ASSESSMENT PLAN

Step 1: Organize for assessment

Step 2: Define program mission

Step 3: Define program goals

Step 4: Define program student learning outcomes

Step 5: Identify assessment methods and targets for each learning outcome

Step 6: Collect the Data

Step 7: Analyze Results/Achievement Target Met or not Met

Step 8: Develop Action Plan and Implement Changes

Step 9: Monitor changes and compare results

Step 10: Review information

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Assessment Plan:

At the beginning of each academic year the academic programs will submit an Assessment Plan and submit to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This will serve as a guide for the department and help prepare your assessment cycle for the academic year. This plan should be discussed and agreed to by the department faculty.

Florida Memorial University

Academic Assessment Plan*

2014-2015

Academic Unit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Course(s) Assessed In</th>
<th>Method of Assessment</th>
<th>Criteria for Success</th>
<th>Faculty Responsible for Assessment</th>
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*Academic Units will declare 2-4 SLOs to be assessed in academic year 2013-14 and what courses they will be assessed in, this will be reported on the Course Reflection.

Each SLO MUST have Rubric

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Course Reflections:

- In an effort both to improve the effectiveness of the assessment process and to ease the burden on faculty, we will use a Course Reflection as a reporting mechanism.
- From the Assessment Plan, faculty include the results of the assessment of their program SLOs in their Course Reflections.
- Coordinators compile the results and write the Program Assessment Report.

Course Reflection Template:

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COURSE REFLECTION

Course Number:
Course Title:
Meeting Time:
Course Instructor:
Semester:

College-Level Competencies Assessed in the Course (For Capstone Course): (Only for Capstone Course please use the CLC Rubrics - contact the assessment director for this Rubric – Please turn in Rubric(s) with your reflection)

Program/Course Student Learning Outcome(s) Assessed in the course: (Include means of assessment and criteria for success)

Modifications Made to Course: (What did you try new this time you taught this course?)

Results of Assessments: (Quantitative results of assessment of SLOs and recent modifications- include rubrics with your reflections)

Discussion and Action Plan for Course Improvement: (What did the assessment tell you and what will you do differently next year to make it better?)

Reflection: (How did the course go? What were the problems or successes? Any highlights or other observations)

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Grade Distribution:

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<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A-</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B-</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C-</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>W/WP/WF</th>
<th>Total</th>
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At the end of the academic year – each program will submit a Program Assessment Report

Assessment Report

A template of the Assessment Plan form used at Florida Memorial University is given below:

**Degree Program Title**/BS/MS degree

**Completed by:** Name of faculty member(s) completing report

I. **Degree Program Mission Statement**

Degree Mission Statement goes here

II. **Use of Results from Last Assessment Cycle**

(What changes did you make to the program? – This is the summary of your results from the last cycle. You MUST assess these changes)

III. **Assessment Report**

**Goals**
List Program goals here

**Student Learning Outcomes**
List all program SLOs here
SLO1:
SLO2:
SLO3:
SLO4:
SLO5:

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Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOs)

SLO 1 List the SLO assessed this cycle and the goal it is related to

Means of Assessment and Criteria for Success: What instrument used for assessment i.e. test, presentation, essay. Also list the criteria i.e. 80% will be able to … with 80% mastery …

Course in which SLO is assessed: Course this is assessed in

Assessment Report Results:
What were your findings? Include your data for the past three years in addition to the new data

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<th>Results</th>
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Use of Results
How will you use your results to implement changes (improvements to your program)?

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Action Plan
What will you do differently next assessment cycle to improve your program?

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1. Use of results to improve program: How will you use the results to improve the program
2. Rationale: Why will you make this change
3. Changes in assessment: Will you change your assessment method
4. Additional resources required: Will you need additional resources to make these changes

INCLUDE ALL SLOs even if you do not assess them – List an assessment plan even if you are not assessing a particular SLO this cycle.

SLO 2:

Means of Assessment and Criteria for Success:

Course in which SLO is assessed:

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</table>

1. Use of results to improve program
2. Rationale:
3. Changes in assessment:
4. Additional resources/budget required:

Narrative:

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IV. **Program Highlights** Write a narrative about anything unique or special about your program

V. **Narrative summary of results:** Write a summary of your results and how you will use them to improve your program – this will become your starting point for the next assessment cycle

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**Final Step in Assessment**

All forms and reports will be up-loaded into the proper folder. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will set a calendar for when information needs to be loaded. The Office will hold workshops during each semester to facilitate the assessment process. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee will meet to evaluate assessment reports and provide feed-back to the programs.
Resources
Guidelines for Assessment, (Publication. (1993). Retrieved February 11, 2008, from California State University Chico:
http://www.csuchico.edu/community/assessment.html


http://www.IY.QrovoSLwisc.edu/assessmentimanualL


Academic Planning and Assessment website:
http://www.umass.edu/oapa/assessmentprogrambased.pdf

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