

**Template for
Academic Program Student Learning Outcomes
Assessment Reporting**

Instructions and Guidelines

The completed template is due each year by November 1. Send your report to Patty Flowers, Assessment Coordinator (pflowers@utm.edu). Your report should include data gathered and analyzed during the preceding academic year and should also include descriptions of any decisions or changes you have made to your program within the preceding academic year. (Note that these changes could be responses to longitudinal data.)

Instructions:

In the heading, fill out the academic year covered by the report (example: 2018-19), the name of the program, the department chair, and the date of submission. If your department has multiple programs, each with a different set of student learning outcomes (SLOs), please submit one report for each program. Be sure to submit reports for both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are concise descriptions of what your students should know and/or be able to do upon graduation from your program. On the template, space is provided for up to six student learning outcomes. If your program has more than six outcomes, you may add more tables. If your program has fewer than six outcomes, you may delete any unneeded tables.

For each student learning outcome, you are asked to include the statement of the outcome; the assessment(s) you will be using; the benchmark you have set; the process you will be using to evaluate student attainment; the data you have collected and analyzed; and any decisions you have made based on your data analysis. Complete one table for each SLO in your program.

Guidelines:

Student Learning Outcome (SLO): List the statement of your student learning outcome. Make sure your SLO is specific, measurable, and understandable to someone outside of your program. “At the completion of this program, the student will...” or “Upon graduation from this program, the student will...” are common phrases used at the beginning of SLO statements.

Many assessment experts suggest between three and five SLOs per program. These SLOs should represent the main skills or areas of knowledge you want your graduates to possess. SLOs may change as your program evolves. If your program is externally accredited, use the SLOs identified by your accrediting agency.

Assessment: List the assessment you will be using to determine how well your students have acquired the skills and/or knowledge described in your SLO. Make sure the assessment you choose is linked to the SLO being measured.

Choose assessments that will be administered to as many of your graduates as possible. Relevant portions of exit exams, portions of rubrics applied to term papers in capstone courses or in other required courses, specific course assignments designed to target a particular SLO, specific exam questions related to the SLO, and class presentations are typical choices for assessments. Other types of assessments are acceptable, so choose assessments that are most appropriate for your program. Avoid using course grades as your assessment; course grades typically include measurements of student work beyond the scope of the SLO and may not accurately reflect how well students have attained the particular knowledge or skill set targeted in your SLO.

Ideally, student attainment of each SLO should be measured by both direct measures (based on student work) and indirect measures (employer surveys, alumni surveys, etc.). As your program's assessment process evolves, you may want to consider including both direct and indirect measures in your assessment. *Caution: Do not rely on only one or two questions, especially multiple-choice questions, to measure student attainment of the SLO. If you do, a poorly-worded question could skew your results and not present a true picture of your students' abilities. A reasonable number of questions, or multiple assessment opportunities, will present a clearer picture of your students' performance. Best practice is to assess an SLO in multiple ways when possible.*

Benchmark: For each assessment, state a benchmark or target for your program's level of student achievement. Benchmarks should be reasonable and are usually based on prior measurements, expected levels of achievement, and the type of assessment you are using. Keep in mind that low benchmarks are easy to meet but may be interpreted as having low expectations for your program. Likewise, high benchmarks imply high expectations but may be difficult to reach, especially when your program is evolving by addressing new outcomes; it may be better to set intermediate benchmarks to reflect incremental changes in your program.

Be sure that your benchmark is stated clearly. For example, simply stating that the benchmark is 70% does not clearly state your goal. Do you want 70% of the students to achieve perfection? Do you want 100% of your students to obtain 70% on your assessment? Or do you want 70% of your students to obtain 70% on your assessment? Usually, it is good practice to state something like “___% of the students will answer ___% of the questions correctly” or “___% of the students will attain a level of ‘proficient’ or higher on the rubric.”

Process: Include pertinent information regarding who is responsible for collecting and analyzing the data, when the data is collected, when the data is analyzed, and when decisions are made about changes in response to the data analysis. This helps establish your program's cycle of assessment.

Data Collection and Analysis: Summarize the data you have collected and describe what the data have shown you. Be sure to tell a complete story, including both numbers and percentages whenever possible. For example, if you only write that 50% of your students met your expected level of attainment, an external reader has no way of knowing whether that means 50% of two students or 50% of 200 students. Your response to this data will be different in these cases: If you mean 50% of two students, perhaps the student who did not do well was a weak student or had an “off day” on the day the assessment was given—in either case, you would not want to make changes to your program based on these results. On the other hand, if you have 50% of 200 students not doing well on your assessment, that means you may want to consider making some sort of change to your program, especially if this trend continues over time.

Note that you do not need sophisticated or complicated data analysis techniques here; just explain what the data is telling you about your program. If you want to use sophisticated data analysis techniques here, that’s fine—but be sure you can explain what you are doing in layman’s terms. Not everyone who will be reading your reports has extensive training in data analysis.

At some point, you need to make an evaluation of whether the students you assessed have met your stated benchmark. You can do that here (“here is my data...the students met the benchmark...”) or you can do that in the next section. Be sure you clearly state your conclusion.

How has the data been used to implement a change or inform a decision?: Describe any changes or decisions you have made based on the analysis of your data. Changes can be small (“we added an assignment to this course to address a weakness in...”) or big (“we added a required course to the program to address...”). In some cases, you may not want to make any changes to your program until you have collected enough longitudinal data to show that the issue you have identified is consistent. In other cases, your students may be doing well on the assessments, so you don’t need to change your program for that particular SLO. You may decide to perform item analyses on test questions for which scores are too low, too high, or inconsistent, to ensure that your assessment measures what you intend for it to measure. If you decide not to make any changes or decide to make changes to your assessments or benchmarks instead of your program, explain why you have made that decision.

Note: If students have consistently met your benchmark on an SLO for several years, you may want to consider either raising your benchmark or “retiring” that particular SLO for a few years (especially if you already have a high benchmark in place) and concentrating your efforts on another learning outcome. Be sure you describe your decision to document the reason(s) you have made the change.

Conversely, if students have consistently failed to meet your benchmark on an SLO for several years, you should have a plan in place to address those repeated failures. Look at trend data—

yes, your students are failing to meet the benchmark, but is their performance improving? Are they getting closer to meeting the benchmark? If not, why not? What are you actively doing to improve student performance? Repeatedly reporting that your students are failing to meet the benchmark but concluding that your best course of action is to “continue monitoring the situation” is unacceptable. Similarly, concluding that your best (and only) course of action is to “lower the benchmark” is unacceptable.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- 1. Can we change our SLO?**
- 2. Can we add an SLO if we have noticed a particular weakness and want to address it or if we are curious about one aspect of student learning in the program?**
- 3. Can we change our assessment or benchmark?**

The answer to all of these questions is “Yes, absolutely!” but be sure you document the changes you make and why you chose to make those changes. It will also raise red flags if you make wholesale, sweeping changes every year. As you make changes, keep in mind that the purpose of this type of assessment is to make sure your program allows students to learn what they need to learn to be successful; changing directions every year makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of your program.

Resources:

SACS COC: SACS COC’s website includes the *Principles of Accreditation*, which lists the standards we must meet to be accredited, and the *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation*, a handbook that gives more information on each standard.

See <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf> for the *Principles of Accreditation* and <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Resource%20Manual.pdf>, beginning on page 36, for the expectations related to institutional effectiveness in educational programs.

ABET: ABET is the external accrediting body for the Engineering Programs and the Computer Science Programs on our campus. ABET’s website has many useful articles on assessment and continuous improvement that are helpful for guidance. See: <http://www.abet.org/accreditation/get-accredited-2/assessment-planning/#articles>

Five Dimensions of Quality, by Linda Suskie; (2015); published by Jossey Bass

Assessing Student Learning, by Linda Suskie; (2009); published by Jossey Bass

Assessment Clear and Simple, by Barbara Walvoord; (2010); published by Jossey Bass

Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education, by Mary J. Allen; (2004); published by Anker

Outcomes-based Academic and Co-Curricular Program Review, by Marilee J. Bresciani; (2006); published by Stylus

Promoting Integrated and Transformative Assessment, by Catherine M. Wehlburg; (2008); published by Jossey Bass

Assessment Essentials, by Trudy W. Banta & Catherine A. Palomba; (2015); published by Jossey Bass

Tools and Techniques for Program Improvement: Handbook for Program Review and Assessment of Student Learning, available on the Western Washington University website, http://www.wvu.edu/depts/vpue/assessment/documents/prog_handbook.pdf

Your previous program assessment reports are posted on the Assessment SharePoint site.

Questions? Contact Patty Flowers (pflowers@utm.edu) or Stephanie Kolitsch (styler@utm.edu).