

**ARCADIA UNIVERSITY
GLENSIDE, PENNSYLVANIA**

Guide for Department/Program Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

The purpose of departmental student learning assessment is two-fold: to maintain quality standards of learning and instruction, and to improve pedagogy to both meet the needs of the content field and the aspirations of our students. The best practices of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Assessment state that a purposeful, organized assessment plan will help departments to place clear value on teaching and learning while enhancing the appeal of the program to students and faculty.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment activities and schedules vary between departments and collect three types of information: Direct Evidence, Indirect Evidence, and External Expectations (explained below). Using the collected information, departments/programs analyze strengths and weaknesses of curricular structure, pedagogy and student experience in order to improve student learning and its supports, thereby positioning students to better achieve programmatic outcomes.

Because teaching and learning occurs in a social context, many aspects change over time: teaching approaches may evolve with experience, knowledge in the discipline may change, students' attitudes or expectations change, new technologies emerge that improve communication of complex subjects or allow new forms of interaction, etc. Therefore, assessing effectiveness needs to be continuous, and integrated into teaching practice as a continual work-in-progress.

It is crucial that a department's Student Learning Outcomes Assessment plans reflect the department's capacity for conducting full and useful assessment activities. It is also crucial that the mechanisms by which information is collected are appropriate to the discipline and that they gather information which is subsequently analyzed and used for decision-making.

Student Learning Assessment Goals:

- Ensure the quality of degree programs;
- Establish clear and measurable outcomes of student learning for the department/program;
- Ensure that students encounter sufficient opportunities to achieve program outcomes;
- Identify those aspects of the student learning experience which are strong and those which need attention;
- Develop future goals to improve and support student learning;
- Establish a university-wide common language concerning student learning assessment.

Building a Program Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

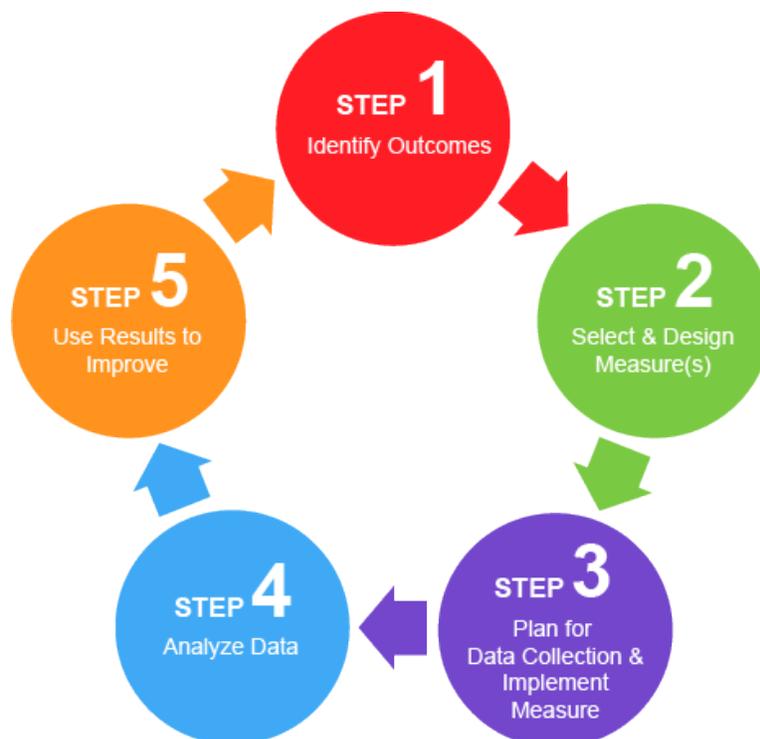
The best assessment is derived from faculty members' questions about their own teaching experience. Are students meeting your expectations? How well are they mastering a complex concept? Are they developing the "habits of mind" appropriate for your discipline? How well does your teaching approach facilitate learning? Can students demonstrate the skills you have identified as

most important? Are they able to apply what they have learned to a novel or more complex problem?

Programs should explore tools available in the discipline to respond to these questions and others, but also allow for the adaptation of existing tools or the creation of new ones.

It may be helpful to think of assessment as a five-step cycle:

1. Start with clear statements of program Student Learning Outcomes. (What key things will students be able to say, think, or do after completing the course/program?)
2. Plan your assessments measures carefully so that they assess the clearly articulated goals chosen for review in this year. (Are students given the opportunity to develop those attributes, and do the course assignments and exams assess them?)
3. Incorporate and implement data/information collections.
4. Analyze using clear, appropriate standards for student performance. (What constitutes exemplary, adequate, and poor work?)
5. Build & Implement Action Plan for curriculum, content, sequencing (etc.) revision to improve student learning. (Write annual report of program SLO Assessment examining last year's Step 5 and this year's assessment and attach to Annual Department Report. See below for template.)



Student Learning Assessment Timeline

Building program assessment for student learning should take into consideration the time and work commitment of assessment activities. Best practices of student learning assessment suggest that data collection and analysis of learning goals should occur regularly, though not necessarily all at once.

To maintain active assessment of student learning, departments/programs should adopt appropriate strategies to allow for clear, focused assessment. Departments might:

- Group Program Student Learning Outcomes into 5 clusters which might be assessed using similar data collections (1-3 Outcomes assessed per year);
- Assess only one of the above clusters per year, on a 5-year cycle;
- Review Program Student Learning Goals every 5 years for appropriateness, given the revisions resulting from the 5-year assessment cycle;
- Review assessment process every 5 years for effectiveness;
- Create a rotating departmental committee to conduct student learning assessment;
- Embed assessment data collection measures in certain appropriate courses (depending on goals assessed);
- Collect information during Capstone every year and review every 5 years;
- Maintain a policy of short, clearly focused assessment measures.

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Every program should develop measurable, programmatic Student Learning Outcomes. These are different from Program Goals, though conceptually related:

Program Goals are broad statements identifying learning parameters, content and relationships between content areas what students should *learn, understand, or appreciate* as a result of their studies by the time they finish a program or a major. Goals may be incorporated in the program mission statement. (“Students will learn...,” “Students will understand...,” “Students will appreciate...”)

Student Learning Outcomes describe in measurable terms what Program Goals mean. SLO statements identify what students will be able to demonstrate, produce or represent as a result of what and how they have learned in a program. Unlike Program Goals, SLOs are not fixed. (“Student will be able to...”)

The number of SLOs varies per program, but generally does not exceed 12.

2. Information Collection: Measures

It is impossible to completely and confidently determine what students have or have not learned. What we can do in assessing student learning is to document behavior, inferring learning outcomes from behaviors observed and data collected. In order to develop a matrix of measures to gather behavior (writing, thinking, skill) data most useful to student learning, programs should consider the following tips to minimize inequalities and maximize usefulness (Suskie 40-2):

- Don’t Rush.

- Use assignments, rubrics and/or questions that are crystal clear.
- Guard against unintended bias.
- Ask a variety of people with diverse perspectives to review assessment tools before implementing them.
- Explore *summative* (end of program, capstone) and *formative* (while student learning is taking place) assessments where appropriate to consider which would best represent student learning.
- Also explore an appropriate balance of *direct* and *indirect* measures.
- Try out assessment measures with a small group of students before using them on a larger scale. And ask those students for feedback on the measure.
- Inform students of the process, usefulness and results of assessment.
- Take time to protect the privacy and dignity of those who are assessed.

The best assessment strategies include multiple approaches to collecting information to review program outcomes and goals. A combination of Direct and Indirect Evidence maintains a higher level of data quality than either Direct or Indirect alone.

Direct Evidence

“Direct evidence of student learning is tangible, visible, self-explanatory, and compelling evidence of exactly what students have and have not learned” (Suskie 20). Such evidence is systematic in nature and criteria-based to assure consistency of evaluation.

Several examples of *Direct Evidence* of Student Learning include:

- Scores on licensure or certification exams;
- Capstone projects scored using a program rubric;
- Written work, presentations, and performances scored using a program rubric;
- Observations of student behavior, conducted systematically;
- Portfolios scored using a program rubric;
- Score gains (over time) on program tests/writing samples;
- Scores on objective-answer exams (T/F, Multiple Choice);
- Ratings of student skills from internship/field experience supervisors.

Indirect Evidence

“Indirect evidence consists of proxy signs that students are probably learning” (Suskie 20).

Evidence is Indirect when it could be influenced by factors external to the learning being assessed, such as student personality and satisfaction, grade inflation, and student experience (external to current learning).

Several examples of *Indirect Evidence* of Student Learning include:

- Course and/or assignment grades (without rubric);
- Retention and graduation rates;
- Graduate program acceptance rates;
- Job placement rates;
- Alumni perceptions;

- Student surveys about knowledge acquisition;
- Course evaluation forms.

External Expectations

One element which influences student learning goals in a university program resides in external expectations of business and industry, and how students are prepared for their careers. In order to put student learning goals into their broad context. Discipline-specific approaches should be taken to understand the industry expectations of students graduating from certain programs.

3. Data Collection

There are two approaches to the collection of data which should be purposeful in the program SLO Assessment Plan.

Collecting Evidence from All – While the evidence gathered from all students concerning an SLO is robust and useful, programs often feel that the time and energy spent in collecting the information and managing the readability of the data is too high.

Collecting Sample Evidence – The appropriate sample size of collected data will depend on what margin of error the program is willing to accept. To achieve a 5% margin of error of a group of 100 students, 80 random students must be surveyed/assessed.

If using a random sample collection, it is important to collect demographic information from the participants so that the randomness of the participants can be mapped on to the overall demographic information for the program as a whole.

4. Analyze the Data

The process of analysis in SLO Assessment Plans usually begins as the data is being collected. Faculty leading assessment should be engaged in conversations about benchmarks and standards of the program throughout the assessment process, and will naturally begin to analyze the data as it begins to appear.

5 Ways to Summarize Results before Analysis:

1. **Tallies** – counts of how many students scored/accomplished benchmarks.
2. **Percentages** – Related to Tallies and more accessible for a broader audience for consideration.
3. **Aggregates** – Overall score and sub-scores, usually used when an assessed outcome has several useful breakdowns in the scoring.
4. **Averages/Medians** – Much like the traditional “bell curve,” medians can inform benchmarks for future assessments.
5. **Qualitative Summaries** – Quick read-throughs and thematic analysis provide more subtle, nuanced contexts for number-based summaries.

5. Results and Action Plan

Once the results are in and the first round of assessment is completed, best practice suggests that sharing the data and analysis not only brings assessment into the broader discussion of program strengths, but also deepens the investment of all stakeholders in the assessment process. All programs are encouraged to share SLO Assessment Process results with student groups, faculty, collaborating departments, and other stakeholders on campus (or off-campus, where appropriate).

- Be sure to take minutes at stakeholder meetings where SLO assessment results are presented. These minutes can become an appendix to an Action Plan.
- Finalize the program SLO Action Plan only after stakeholder meeting discussions are complete.
- Involve students in conversations about both the SLO Assessment Plan and the resulting Action Plan.

Assessing the Assessment

At the conclusion of each full cycle of assessment, best practices suggest that programs should conduct a full review of the current Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan. Several questions might be asked of the SLO program assessment plan itself, along with the measures chosen and scope of results:

- Was the work accomplished in the full SLO assessment plan evenly allocated over time?
- Did each faculty member contribute to the annual/full SLO assessment actions?
- Were revisions made to the curriculum, content, sequencing of the program which were clearly based in data results of the SLO assessments?
- Were measures created to collect data which were effective at collecting the data required?
- Did stakeholders have ample time to discuss and implement measures and results?
- Were the assessment measures, actions, results and improvements communicated to the stakeholders (faculty, students, Provost's Office) in a timely fashion?
- Is there clear cause to adjust the calendar on the SLO assessment plan?

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Resources

Maki, Peggy L. *Assessing for Learning*, 2nd Edition. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2010.

Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Walvoord, Barbara E. *Assessment: Clear and Simple*, 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Annual Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report
Arcadia University

Program:
Date:
Summary
Based on the program SLO Assessments and the designated outcome(s) assessed for the academic year, the major program submits a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report annually that contains the program assessment plan, assessment data and analysis, and action steps to be taken by the program based on these results. See below for the outline of this report.
Student Learning Outcome(s) Assessed:
Assessment Protocol Description:
Assessment Data and Findings:
Analysis of Data:
Are these results satisfactory? Why or Why not?
Action Plan based on Assessment Results:
Time Frame for Action Plan:
Last Year's Action Plan:
Results of Previous Years' Action Plans:

Assessment Data: Please include the data that you used to complete the above report.
Attach rubrics, tallies, and methods of validation.