Guide for Creating a Program Assessment Plan

Fort Lewis College Office of Assessment

Fort Lewis College's
Assessment Plan Resource Guide
Use this guide as a resource when developing your assessment plan

What is program assessment?
The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of providing "students with the best possible education and to ensure student learning is of appropriate scope, depth, and rigor"
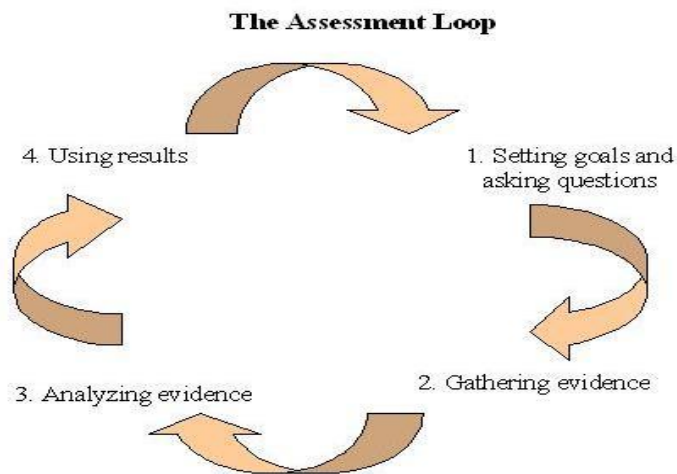~ Palomba & Banta (1999)

Where do you want students to be at the end of a course or program and how will you know if they get there?

These two questions are the foundation of assessment. If you have ever given an exam, led a class discussion, or handed out an assignment and then used what you discovered from the student's learning to improve your process, then you have engaged in assessment.

At Fort Lewis College, assessment is driven by faculty and is designed to reflect the goals and values of a discipline, guide teaching practices to improve student learning, and assist in improving curriculum.

Factors of Good Assessment
- It improves student learning
- It is faculty-driven
- It is on-going
- It closes the loop or acts on the findings
- It evaluates the effectiveness of programs, courses or services, not individual instructors or students.
- It is meaningful, manageable and sustainable

The Assessment Loop

1. Setting goals and asking questions
2. Gathering evidence
3. Analyzing evidence
4. Using results

1. Program Mission Statement

Mission: the values and philosophy of the program, a vision of what the program is supposed to do. A mission statement *might* include a brief history and philosophy of the program, the type of students to be served, the academic environment and primary focus of the curriculum, faculty roles, the contributions to and connections with the community, the role of research, and a stated commitment to diversity and nondiscrimination.

(adapted from M. Allen, 2002; taken form Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Learning Outcomes Assessment Planning Guide).
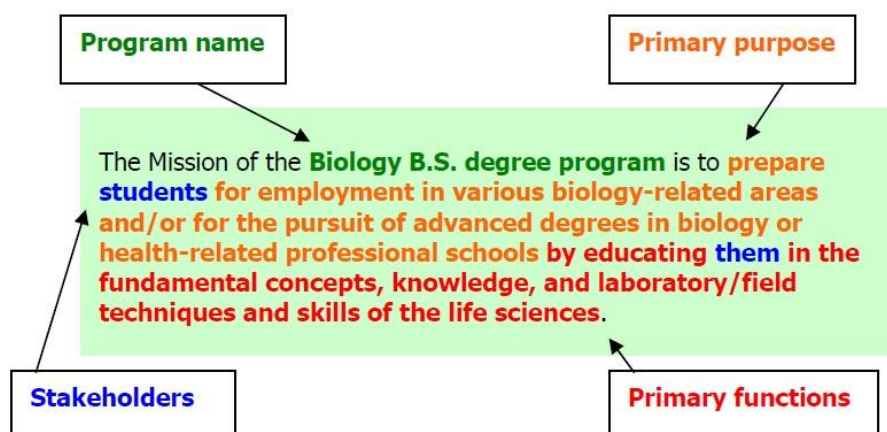
Structure of a Program Mission Statement

"The mission of (**name of program or department**) is to (**your primary purpose**) by providing (**primary functions or activities**) to (**stakeholders**). (Additional clarifying statements).

Note: the order of the components of a mission statement may vary from the above structure

Example:

Program Mission Statement Example

(University of Connecticut: http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/HowToWriteMission.pdf)

Checklist for a Mission Statement

✓ Is the statement clear and concise?
✓ Does it clearly state the purpose of the program?
✓ Does it indicate the primary function or activities of the program?
✓ Does it support the mission of the department and the institution?
✓ Does it reflect the program's priorities and values?

(University of Connecticut: http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/HowToWriteMission.pdf)

2. Learning Outcomes

Definition: Learning outcomes describe what a learner will know or be able to do – the essential knowledge, abilities (skills) and attitudes (values, dispositions) that constitute the integrated learning expected by a student in the course or program.

There are three types of learning outcomes, which reflect different aspects of student learning:

Cognitive: "What do you want your students to know?"
Affective: "What do you want your students to think or care about?"
Behavioral: "What do you want your students to be able to do?"

Questions to help guide your thinking:

1. What knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions should the ideal student graduating from our program demonstrate?
2. How will they be able to demonstrate these capacities?
3. What assessments can we use to demonstrate growth in students' knowledge, skills, abilities and dispositions as they progress through the program?
4. Where in your program (courses) are these outcomes addressed and to what level (introduced, reinforced, mastered)?

Revising learning outcomes

Given that learning outcomes *focus on observable and measurable actions performed by students*, the selection of an action verb for each outcome is crucial. Determining the best verb to use in a learning outcome can be challenging because of its need to accurately reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities being studied. Below you will find a list of common learning outcome action verbs. This is a brief list of verbs that can be used in writing learning outcomes at the collegiate level. Certain verbs are unclear and subject to different interpretations in terms of what action they are specifying. *Verbs/verb phrases such as become aware of, appreciate, understand, learn, know, and become familiar with should be avoided; they frequently denote behavior that is not easily observed or measured.***

Common Learning Outcome Verbs based on Blooms Revised Taxonomy**

Level 1. Knowledge Level	Level 2: Comprehension Level	Level 3: Application Level	Level 4: Analysis Level	Level 5: Synthesis Level	Level 6: Evaluation Level
describe	classify	apply	analyze	develop	evaluate
define	generalize	explain	distinguish	plan	interpret
identify	interpret	classify	design	create	compare
choose	summarize	examine	illustrate	integrate	conclude
locate	predict	generalize	categorize	establish	review
read	demonstrate	produce	identify	compose	justify
arrange	tell	compute	differentiate	manage	assess
recognize	discuss	organize	calculate	formulate	investigate

*Many faculty members have found it difficult to apply this six-level taxonomy, and some educators have simplified and collapsed the taxonomy into three general levels (Crooks, 1988): The first category is knowledge (recall or recognition of specific information). The second category combines comprehension and application. The third category is described as "problem solving," transferring existing knowledge and skills to new situations.

Structure of a Learning Outcome Statement:

1. an action word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated
2. a learning statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated in the performance
3. a broad statement of the criterion tor standard for acceptable performance

How many do you need??

4-6 to start! This is an ongoing and iterative process!!

Checklist for writing learning outcomes:

✓ Does the outcome clearly articulate what the student should be able to do as result of the activity / course / program?
✓ Is the action done by the student rather than the faculty member?
✓ Can the action be measured?
✓ Does assessment of this outcome enable you to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement

Examples:

Example 1:
Upon completion of this program, students will be able to…….
1) Learning outcomes specify both an observable behavior and the object of that behavior:
    "Students will be able to write a research paper:
2) In addition, the criterion should also be specified:
    "Students will be able to write a research paper in the appropriate scientific style."
3. Ideally, the condition under which the behavior occurs can be specified:
    "At the end of their field research, students will be able to write a research paper in the appropriate scientific style."

Example 2:
Upon completion of this program, students will be able to…….
Poor: know the historically important systems of psychology.
Better: know the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.
Best: recognize and articulate the foundational assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic and cognitive approaches to psychology

Example 3: Anthropology (University of Rhode Island)
By the time of graduation, anthropology majors should be able to:

1. Describe the breadth of anthropology and be able to characterize the range of anthropology's distinctive philosophical and methodological approaches with respect to other disciplines within the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities.

2. Demonstrate an understanding of the historical development and centrality of the "four-field approach" in American anthropology, with the ability to define each subdiscipline's contributions to the whole.

3. Explain the basic processes of biological evolution and specifically, describe the evidence for humankind's descent from apes and the subsequent course of human evolution.

4. Describe modern human biological diversity and articulate an informed position on the question of biological races of humans.

5. Demonstrate a scientific understanding of the development and operation of contemporary ethnic/cultural variation in humans, including an appreciation of ethical concerns arising from that variation.

6. Demonstrate the ability to think holistically and comparatively in describing human life-ways using non-ethnocentric methods.

7. Demonstrate knowledge of the wide range of past and present human biocultural systems, including ecological relationships, social and cultural organization, and ideology (belief systems).

8. Assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of using archaeology as a method for elucidating culture history.

9. Understand the place of research in the development and evaluation of scientific theories in general and anthropological theory in particular.

10. Understand the importance of the mental-behavioral and emic-etic distinction in anthropological research and theory building.

11. Comprehend different research methodologies, their strengths and limitations as applied to anthropological research questions.

12. Be able to understand the use of quantitative methods in the analysis of data from all four sub fields of anthropology and have the ability to evaluate the use and misuse of analyses of quantitative data in anthropological research.

13. Articulate anthropological insights into contemporary issues of multiculturalism and diversity with reference to both past and present human biological and ethnic or cultural variation.

14. Apply ethical principles to the conduct of anthropological research and the applications of its findings.

15. Articulate an extensive and detailed awareness of the great variation in human biocultural adaptations worldwide and the implications of this variation for present-day human interactions.

Example 4: History (California State University Long Beach)
Upon completing the Bachelor's of Arts in History, individuals will be able to demonstrate the following:

1. An understanding of the discipline of history and its methods, including such concepts as causality, conceptualization, and contextualization, as well as the role of theoretical advances within the discipline.

2. An understanding of the major trends of historical knowledge of at least two subfields, and the relations between subfields within the larger context of global change.

3. The facility to conduct research in both primary and secondary resources.

4. Mastery of advanced analytical skills, including the ability to formulate historical questions, determine bias, express original arguments about the past, and evaluate and interpret various types of evidence.

5. Familiarity with basic mechanical skills of writing and analysis, including computer literacy and other skills appropriate to the discipline.

6. Proficiency in presentation skills, including professionalism, facility with Powerpoint or other techniques of audio and visual content delivery, and the ability to construct an organized and coherent verbal presentation directed to appropriate audience levels.

Example 5: Political Science (University of Redlands)
Students who successfully complete a major in Government will:

1. Analyze and develop arguments using theories and methods of the study of politics and government.
2. Describe how concepts and theories organize knowledge of politics and government.
3. Identify and critique theories that explain politics and government.
4. Communicate effectively about politics and government in both written and oral forms.
5. Identify pressing problems at global, national, state, and local levels.
6. Evaluate solutions to pressing problems at global, national, state, and local levels.

Example 6: Psychology (University of Wisconsin)
Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent With the Science and Application of Psychology
1. Knowledge Base of Psychology
Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.
2. Research Methods in Psychology
Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
3. Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology
Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.
4. Application of Psychology
Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.
5. Values in Psychology
Students will be able to weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline.

3. Curriculum Mapping
A curriculum map is a graphical representation of the alignment between courses in a required curriculum and the program's learning outcomes. It can also be used to identify where in the curriculum key concepts are addressed and how. Curriculum maps allow for the creation of a cohesive curriculum ensuring that students have sufficient opportunity to master specific outcomes. Curricular mapping focuses on communication, curricular dialogue, and coherency. Keep in mind, the term "mapping" is a verb. The actual maps are the by-products of ongoing active engagement in ongoing curricular dialog (Hale, J. 2011).

How is a curriculum map created?
> **Step 1:** Faculty members begin with a) the program's intended student learning outcomes, b) recommended and required courses (including General Education courses if appropriate) and c) other

required events/experiences (e.g., internships, department symposium, advising session, national licensure exams)

Step 2: Create the "map" in the form of a table

Step 3: Mark the courses the currently address the outcomes with "I" to indicate where an outcome is introduced, "R" to indicate where the outcome is reinforces and students are provided opportunities to practice, and "M" to indicate that students should have had sufficient opportunities to practice and can demonstrate mastery. An "A" can be used to indicate where evidence might be collected and evaluated for program-level assessment

Step 4: Faculty analyze the map and discuss and revise as necessary

Best Practices to Guide your Curriculum Mapping
- Build in practice and multiple learning trials for students: introduce, reinforce, master. Students will perform best if they are introduced to the learning outcome early in the curriculum and then given sufficient practice and reinforcement before evaluation of their level of mastery takes place.
- Use the curriculum map to identify the learning opportunities (e.g., assignments, activities) that produce the program's outcomes.
- Allow faculty members to teach to their strengths (note: each person need not cover all outcomes in a single course). "Hand off" particular outcomes to those best suited for the task.
- Ask if the department/program is trying to do too much. Eliminate outcomes that are not highly-valued and then focus on highly-valued outcomes by including them in multiple courses. (The eliminated outcomes can still be course-level outcomes. They need not disappear completely from the curriculum.)
- Set priorities as a department/program. Everyone working together toward common outcomes can increase the likelihood that students will meet or exceed expectations.
- Communicate: Each faculty member can make explicit connections across courses for the students. Do not expect students to be able to make those connections by themselves.

Assessment How-to: Curriculum Mapping, University of Hawaii, Mānoa

4. Assessment Methods and Strategies

Quality departmental assessment plans are closely aligned to the curriculum and makes use of information and assessment measures that are already in place. It may be helpful for departments to take an inventory of assessment practices that are already being used (i.e., competency exams, capstone courses, essays, etc.) and align these to the program outcomes.

It is important to use both direct (analyzing student projects to analyze the completion of objectives) and indirect (asking students to report how well they have met program objectives) assessment. (Indirect evidence is also helpful for learning about information that might not be directly linked to an outcome—like how a program supports student learning or how a particular program helped students work with the community.)

6 Direct Assessment Techniques
1. Standardized Tests: Tests such as the Praxis Series of Teacher Education and general education tests like Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) which attempts to measure core academic ability can be used to examine students' success or compare FLC students with national norms. Because these tests can be costly and have potential reliability issues, we do not recommend them.

2. Locally Developed Tests: Because these can be much more reliable than standardized tests, they are preferred. Programs can develop general tests administered to all students or embed questions into course exams. These can take the form of essay, multiple-choice, true-false, matching, or completion formats. We do not recommend multiple choice tests because, according to the AAC&U, "Multiple choice tests, in particular, provide little evidence of the analytical power, creativity, resourcefulness, empathy, and abilities to apply knowledge and transfer skills from one environment to another that students will need for college success" (Allen 80-1).
3. Embedded Assignments and Course Activities: These should be varied and represent multiple attempts for students to satisfy objectives. A few examples:
   a. Classroom assessment activities such as essay tests
   b. Culminating projects, such as senior theses and papers in capstone courses
   c. Poster presentations and student research conferences
   d. Senior recitals and exhibitions
4. Competence Interviews: orally administered exams that allow faculty to ask follow-up questions. Questions are generally open-ended. A few examples:
   a. Closed-ended: "Name the current president of the U.S."
   b. Open-ended: "Describe how checks and balances are built into our national government," "How well do you think these checks and balances work?" and "What evidence leads you to that conclusion?"
5. Portfolios: Students compile their work and often reflect about it
6. Collective Portfolios: faculty compiles student work based on a legitimate sampling scheme. Collective Portfolios can be assessed through scoring rubrics

4 Indirect Assessment Techniques
1. Surveys: should contain closed-ended and open-ended questions. Should align with objectives. A few examples:
   a. "How could we improve the advising in our program?"
   b. "What do you expect to do with a degree in this area?"
2. Interviews: general conversations about student learning of program objectives. A few examples:
   a. "What is one thing the department could do to help you learn more effectively?
   b. ""How could the program be improved to help prepare you for graduate school?"
3. Focus Groups: planned discussions among small groups of participants who are asked a series of carefully constructed questions about their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. A few examples:
   a. "I'd like everyone to start out by stating a word or phrase that best describes your view of the program"
   b. "Thinking about the curriculum and the required courses, how well do you think they prepared you for upper-division work?"
4. Reflective Essays: Open-ended survey questions and course journals and longer essays. Cover letters of portfolios that ask students to discuss their strengths and weaknesses, their development as students, and their preparation for their anticipated career. A few examples:
   a. Describe the most valuable thing you learned in our program and explain how this will be useful in your future

b. Which of the program's learning objectives are the most and least important to you? Why?

Rubrics

Rubrics are a guides to help score a student's performance. Rubrics can be used for scoring, grading or to provide feedback on an assignment or task. A rubric creates a common framework and language, assists in efficiently examining a large body of work, is criterion-referenced, leads to meaningful conversations between faculty when created collaboratively promotes shared expectations and grading practices.

For Courses: Rubrics enable faculty to *clearly communicate expectations* for student performance to students. They *support more consistent and objective assessment* of student work. They also *facilitate detailed feedback* to students. When areas of strength and weakness in performance are marked on an essay rubric, students more easily comprehend the reasoning behind their professor's assessment of their work.

For Student Outcomes Assessment: Rubrics facilitate quality conversations among faculty about student learning, shorten the time it takes to do Student Outcomes Assessment, and contribute to the validity and reliability of the assessment process.

- Stevens and Levi, Ch. 2

Why use a rubric?
Course Issues:
You are four weeks behind on your grading.
You have graded all your essays but you are afraid that you graded the last ones more rigorously than the ones you graded two weeks ago.
You have carefully described in class your expectations for an assignment but you now have twenty e-mails from students who say, "I don't know what you want on this assignment."

Student Outcomes Assessment Concerns:
You want to engage in meaningful assessment of student learning without making this your life's work.
You wish that your conversations about student learning in your majors were more focused and stayed on track from semester to semester.
You lack confidence that your assessment efforts are yielding information that your department can actually use to enhance your majors' learning experiences.

- Stevens & Levi, pp. 4-6.

What is the difference between grading and assessing?

Assessment is an evaluative process distinguished from grading. Grades are given by individual faculty to individual students; assessment is concerned with whether a population of students achieves learning outcomes developed by a department for a course or program. While grades may not be used as assessment data, certain projects, exams or assignments that were given a grade may be used as long as evaluated by other faculty with a rubric.

Why not grades? The use of grades in program assessment is highly discouraged for several reasons:

1) Grades indirectly represent the quality of student work as they often reflect more than just the students' intellectual skills and abilities. For example, does a course have attendance requirements or strict due date policies?

2) Grades represent the perspective of a single member of the faculty based on work in a single course. As such, they do not provide a programmatic perspective on the attributes of student achievement. Part of the goal of program level assessment is to develop agreement among faculty about what proficiency in a given skill or knowledge area looks like. Program learning outcomes and the levels of proficiency graduates will exhibit should represent shared goals of the faculty working toward an exceptional program that produces successful graduates.

3) Grades are an inefficient way to gather useful program assessment data. If grades are used in combination with faculty review of actual student work (which is required, because it is the heart of the matter) then basically both lines of evidence - the direct line, the actual student work and the indirect line, grades - both offer faculty perspectives on the quality of student work. Since faculty must review actual student work as part of their assessment plan for a given outcome, why not combine it with a line of evidence that provides insight into the perceived quality of the work from a different perspective - either that of the graduates themselves, as part of an exit survey for example, or from their employers? Using one or both of these alternative lines of indirect evidence, instead of grades, can provide meaningful insights.

Embedded Questions and Assignments
Embedded assessment, in its broadest sense, provides opportunity to evaluate student progress and performance from outcomes integrated into instructional materials, indistinguishable from day-to-day classroom activities. These embedded questions or assignments are often designed by faculty committees, providing assessment beyond what was planned for the particular course by its instructor(s). If reviewing existing exam questions, select multiple questions for reliability in terms of the conclusions one draws (Wilson & Sloane 2000).

Formative and Summative Assessment
Formative assessment is ongoing and is used to monitor student learning and give feedback to both the instructor and the student. The instructor can use the information to improve their teaching and the student to improve their learning.
- Students can identify their strengths and weaknesses and focus on areas that need work.
- Instructors can identify where student are struggling and can address problems immediately.

Summative assessment evaluates student learning at the end of an instructional unit or course. Many times summative assessment is referred to as high stakes, which lead to a grade. Summative assessment can be used formatively if students and faculty use it to guide their activities in other courses.

6. Creating your Timeline
A good strategy is to first assess an objective/outcome for which the department has evidence already available (e.g., choose to assess students' writing ability first because students already write reports in a required course and a rubric to evaluate writing already exists).
- A program can assess one outcome per year (but plan to have all outcomes assessed during one program-review cycle).

- Divide the workload: have different teams (2-4 faculty members per team) responsible for taking the lead in each assessment activity.
- Make it public! Inform students of the program goals and outcomes in multiple ways: catalog, syllabi, and in-class reminders

7. Distribution, Discussion and Use of Results

"Close the loop" by concretely modifying programs to reflect what has been learned. Make sure to provide room for this in the assessment plan.

Changes will be dictated by assessment findings and can take a variety of forms:

Course-Level Changes may include:
- modifications to curriculum and assessment methods like creating a synthesis or portfolio project
- modifications of outcome statements

Program-Level Changes may include:
- modifications to course sequences and elective requirements
- need for new or different resources
- faculty professional development
- adoption of new technologies

8. Assessing the Assessment Process and Reporting Results

Departments will meet annually to review and reflect upon the assessment process as well as the findings. An annual assessment plan detailing information on specific assessment practices, data collected, findings, and plans for incorporating those findings will be submitted in Task Stream.

- Adapted from Fort Lewis College Assessment Committee Assessment Plan Recommendation
Version 1.0 (April 2012)

Checklist for review of program level assessment plans:

- ✓ The OUTCOMES selected for assessment are appropriately significant, focused on student learning, and are observable and measurable.
- ✓ Assessment methods are adequate to measure student achievement. Multiple measures are used. The plan does not rely on a single type of measure.
- ✓ The time frame described is appropriate and workable. The plan takes advantage of current data sources and activities that are already in place.
- ✓ It is clear who will do the assessments, collect and analyze data. There is appropriate faculty involvement and sharing of tasks.
- ✓ There is a formal mechanism for reporting results of assessment and for summarizing results and to ensure that assessment provide information to be used in program improvement.
- ✓ The plan is feasible, workable and affordable, given available resources. If possible, suggest ways to make the assessment process more effective and efficient.

(Adapted from Casper College's Comprehensive Assessment Plan, 2006)

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