



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**

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Degree Program Assessment  
Business Process Document

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University of South Carolina Columbia and Palmetto College Campuses

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OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, ASSESSMENT, AND ANALYTICS  
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## **Introduction**

This business process document (BPD) explains how the University of South Carolina-Columbia<sup>1</sup> performs degree program assessment. It also serves as the baseline for training those who are new to the academic degree program assessment process. This document describes how to develop an assessment plan, details the responsibilities of persons engaged in assessment, introduces the system used to submit assessment reports, reviews the university's assessment reporting timelines, and finally outlines the repercussions for programs that fail to develop, execute, or report assessment findings according to the University's established policies and reporting deadlines.

## **Understanding Assessment**

The term 'assessment' is used in numerous ways. We often speak of assessing individual student performance in courses or courses of study; we evaluate individual student learning when we grade tests, essays, exercises, research papers, projects, performances, portfolios, comprehensive exams, theses and dissertations, etc.

But in the context of institutional improvement, 'assessment' refers to the process by which we gather data on student learning and review these data in aggregate to answer the question, "Are our students learning what we expect them to learn?" The focus of assessment in this context is thus the degree program, not the individual student or an individual course. In contrast to the evaluations we provide individual students (normally in the form of assignment and course grades) so that they can determine their progress in a course or course of study, assessment provides faculty and administrators in charge of degree programs with valuable information as to how well our programs are working with respect to student learning.

## **Why Do We Assess?**

### **1) We care about our students**

Because we care about our students, we want to ensure they are learning what we believe they will need to be successful in the ventures and career pathways they enter after completing our programs. We also want to improve student learning. By measuring performance against learning outcomes and examining the results, faculty and program administrators are able to discern what strategies or techniques are working well and what needs to be changed or modified. According to Value Colleges ("Does Accreditation Matter", 2018) one of the most important factors in acquiring a successful education and furthermore, a dependable career, is choosing a reputable college. When a college follows a rigorous process like assessment, it gives students more likelihood of success. When it is embedded effectively within our institutional system, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (Thomas A. Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p.7).

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the main campus located in Columbia, South Carolina, as well as Palmetto College, which is comprised of the two-year campuses of Salkehatchie, Sumter, Union, Lancaster, Ft. Jackson, Laurens, and PC-Columbia.

## **2) Assessment is a University Policy**

Student learning outcomes assessment is a university priority and responsibility. Specifically, university policy ACAF 3.0 <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/acaf300.pdf> addresses at a high level, the assessment requirements discussed in detail in this document. The information gleaned from assessment activities is used for planning and program improvement.

## **3) Assessment is required for the University's external accreditation**

The university's assessment activities are mandated by external agencies as well as discipline-specific accrediting agencies. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the external accrediting agency for the University of South Carolina. With respect to assessment, SACSCOC Standard 8.2 reads:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the following areas: student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.  
(Student outcomes: educational programs)

In order to fully explain the University's approach to the standard above, this document is primarily focused on assessment of student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs. Hereafter, this will be referred to as degree program assessment.

### **USC's Approach to Degree Program Assessment**

In order to maintain compliance with SACSCOC's Teaching and Learning standards, the University of South Carolina requires that every degree program draft student learning outcomes and establish ways to evaluate students' performance on those outcomes. These responsibilities are primarily borne by program faculty because faculty are the experts in their disciplines and know best how to evaluate student mastery of program learning outcomes. The mechanisms each program has in place to respond to students' performance constitutes an "assessment plan."

USC's degree program assessment approach employs a coordinated and carefully designed set of processes and tools used by those responsible for assessment to submit, review, store, and access academic program assessment plans and reports. Quality assurance procedures are built into the process at the institutional level to ensure data integrity and appropriate responses to student performance on learning outcomes by program administrators. The University's Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) serves in a quality assurance capacity by reviewing and providing feedback on all degree program assessment plans in accordance with SACSCOC standards.

### **Tenets of an Effective Assessment Process**

An effective assessment process that is ongoing and aimed at understanding and improving student learning involves making student learning expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance.

While allowing for significant differences in assessment practices among disciplines, in order to be relevant and useful for departments and programs, assessment procedures should meet the following criteria:

- a. Programs should have clearly defined and measurable student learning outcomes that focus on knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- b. Assessment measures should clearly address the degree to which students attain the defined learning outcomes.
- c. Assessment measures should be independent from course grades and teaching evaluations.
- d. Multiple methods of assessing outcomes should be used, including at least one direct measure of student learning.
- e. Data and information should be collected and analyzed longitudinally, as well as in each reporting cycle.
- f. The analysis of data should result in findings relevant to the program.
- g. Improvements in the program should be planned and enacted in response to the findings.

Each of the tenets listed above are to be incorporated in the assessment plans developed for each degree program at the University of South Carolina. Figure 1 below best illustrates the degree program assessment process outlined above.

Figure 1: Academic Program Assessment Process



*Source: Brophy and Fields, "Sustaining Excellence in Academic Assessment: Designing and implementing an Institutional Academic Assessment System". SACSCOC Annual Conference, 2016*

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Persons Charged with Assessment**

In this section, we will outline the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the degree program assessment process.

#### **Faculty**

Primary responsibility for the assessment of student learning outcomes within the degree program is borne by the faculty for each academic unit. Faculty are to discuss whether their

students are learning and if so, how well. The process of assessment regularizes and formalizes what faculty do as part their normal professional practice. The results from program assessment should not be used for promotion and/or tenure files or for annual performance evaluations of faculty. Assessment activities, however, are integral to the processes of teaching and learning. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) provides opportunities for faculty to collaborate and learn more about assessment through workshops and sessions offered throughout the year.

### **Deans**

Deans are responsible for ensuring that all academic programs within their respective colleges and schools have assessment plans, carry out assessments that meet prescribed standards, and submit reports that document program improvements based on assessment results. Each dean should appoint one or more persons to serve as liaisons to the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA). These liaisons represent the college on the University's Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC).

### **Assessment Advisory Committee Representative**

The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) is comprised of representatives appointed by the deans of the various colleges and schools to serve as the key point persons for each college with respect to degree program assessment. The charge of the AAC is to:

- Provide the foundation for developing an institutional climate that assures and improves the quality of education each academic program promises and offers
- Promote assessment as a comprehensive process that is ongoing, systematic, and sustainable
- Serve as a channel for communication among faculty and the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA)
- Make recommendations regarding assessment-related policies and procedures
- Assist and advise faculty within one's college or school in the development and implementation of meaningful assessment initiatives

The AAC typically meets twice in an academic year. These meetings are primarily for updating AAC representatives at each college on the status of degree program assessment, future assessment initiatives and next steps. Information from these meetings should be shared by the AAC member to those within their colleges. Additionally, the AAC is a community of practice where its members share experiences and best practices in assessment with each another.

### **OIRAA Executive Director (OIRAA-ED)**

The Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) directs the University's institutional research and institutional effectiveness activities. The Executive Director attends all meetings of the AAC and reports degree program assessment successes and challenges to the Office of the Provost.

### **OIRAA Director of Institutional Effectiveness & Accreditation (DIE)**

The Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation directs the University's accreditation requirements, communicates with university officials and serves as a liaison between UofSC and SACSCOC representatives to ensure that the university is in continuous compliance with accreditation standards.

### **OIRAA Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness (ADIE)**

The OIRAA Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness (ADIE) directs the academic assessment activities for the University. The ADIE chairs the Assessment Advisory Committee and is the primary administrator of the Assessment Plan Composer (APC) assessment system.

### **OIRAA Assessment Coordinator (OIRAA-AC)**

The OIRAA Assessment Coordinator is responsible for collecting and reviewing assessment plans and reports, and for providing timely feedback to faculty and staff to improve the quality of assessment. The OIRAA- AC is the primary point of contact for degree program assessment at the University.

### **Plan Writer**

The plan writer is the person at the college who drafts and submits the program's assessment plan. This person may be a program administrator, faculty member, instructor, dean or associate dean, or anyone at the college tasked with writing an assessment plan. Because all assessment plans are submitted through the Assessment Plan Composer (APC) system, each plan writer will need a unique username and password. The OIRAA-AC sends report/plan feedback and status updates directly to the plan writer via APC; therefore, it is imperative that OIRAA has the correct contact information for each plan writer on file.

### **SACSCOC External Reviewer**

An external SACSCOC reviewer is a volunteer representative from a SACSCOC member school who reviews the materials and visits schools seeking re-affirmation of accreditation. For the purposes of degree program assessment, a SACSCOC external reviewer will be provided with read-only access to Assessment Plan Composer in order to review the assessment reports submitted during the previous five-year period. Typically, access is provided to the SACSCOC external reviewer three months prior to the external review deadline.

### **The Office of the Provost**

The Office of the Provost ultimately oversees all the activities of the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics. The Office of the Provost sets the strategic priorities for OIRAA to include its degree program assessment activities. Should assessment challenges arise that cannot be resolved internally by OIRAA staff, the Office of the Provost can address these challenges directly with college deans and/or the provost. The Provost has overall responsibility and oversight of assessment processes for academic programs.

### **Institutional Effectiveness Data Analyst (IEDA)**

The aim of assessment is continuous improvement. However, there are many instances where programs consistently avoid making, proposing, or reporting any changes to delivery, curricula or assessment over multiple assessment cycles. To spur conversation among program faculty about various elements of the program that are evidenced by the assessment results, the Institutional Effectiveness Data Analyst (IE Data Analyst) evaluates the assessment results submitted by the program and initiates in-depth conversations with plan writers and program directors about trends and issues present in the program's assessment data. These conversations are designed to prompt program administrators to consider options for making one or more changes to the program for improvement.

This document uses the terms assessment plan and assessment report interchangeably. However, the assessment report contains eight sections: mission, goals, curriculum, learning outcomes, measures and criteria, methods, results and use of results. The bulk of the assessment report is developed through the course of drafting the assessment plan. Therefore, when examining the university’s assessment process, the term assessment plan refers to the program’s mission, goals, curriculum, learning outcomes, measures and criteria and methods. An assessment report adds the actual results of students’ performance on the learning outcomes and the program’s use of assessment results for improvement. Figure 2 best represents the distinction between the sections included in the assessment plan and those in the assessment report.

Figure 2: Components of an Assessment Plan/Report



## The Assessment Plan – Assessment Basics

### Mission

A program’s mission states the purpose of the degree program, why it exists and its unique or signature features. The program mission statement also tells what students or other constituents will gain from the program (in broad terms, but specific to the discipline) and who i.e., target audience or students, benefits from the program. The program’s mission should be aligned with the University and college missions.

### Goals

Program goal statements describe the overarching values, achievements or learning experiences students are expected to obtain as a result of completing the degree program. Goal statements address knowledge (what students will learn/know), and/or skills (what students can or will do) expected of graduates/students in the program. Goals for the program may also address values students are to adopt (what students/graduates will care about) after completing the program. Expected achievements of graduates of the program such as career accomplishments, personal growth, and community involvement can also be considered as goals for a degree program.

### Curriculum

This section of the assessment plan addresses key points in the program’s curriculum where students are given opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills or values outlined in the program’s goal statements. These opportunities can take the form of classroom activities, or experiential learning activities. In this section, refrain from listing all courses required for the

degree. Instead, focus on just those that support the goals for the program. When referring to courses that support the goals for the program, please list the course number and title. One option for describing the curriculum that supports the goals for the program is to use a curriculum alignment matrix. A sample of curriculum alignment matrices are contained in the appendix to this document.

### Learning Outcomes

Each academic program should have defined program learning outcomes. Program learning outcomes are actionable statements that detail what tasks students will perform in order to show evidence of their proficiency and knowledge of a particular program goal. The University of South Carolina subscribes to the SMART Model for writing and reviewing learning outcomes. This model was initially introduced in 1954 by P.F. Drucker and has been widely used to write and review student learning outcomes (SLOs). The components of the SMART Model are discussed briefly in the table below:

Table 1. The SMART Model

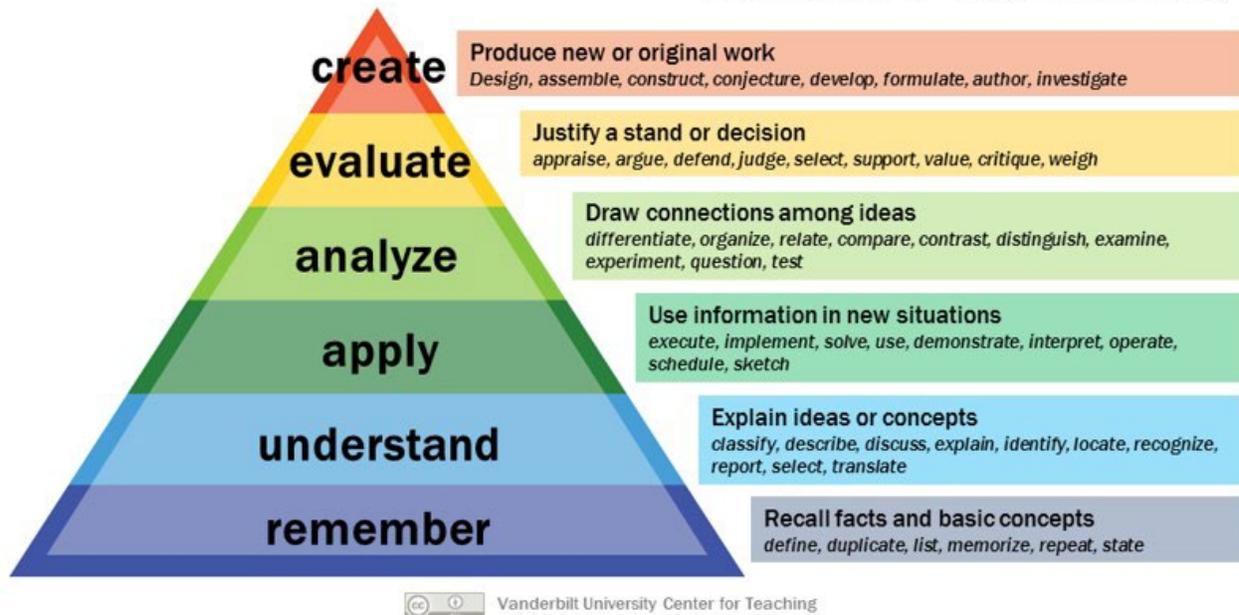
<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>Specific</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	<b>Attainable</b>	<b>Results-oriented</b>	<b>Time Bound</b>
What will be accomplished? What will students be able to do?	Is the outcome quantifiable? Can it be measured? How much change is expected?	Can the outcome be accomplished in the proposed time frame with the available resources and support?	Does the outcome address the goal? Will the outcome have an impact on the goal?	Does the outcome propose a timeline when the outcome will be met?

Action words that are well suited for drafting clear learning outcome statements that incorporate SMART model components are available in the appendix to this document.

Bloom’s Taxonomy is another valuable resource for drafting learning outcomes. In 1948, a group of educators began classifying educational goals and outcomes. The original Taxonomy of Educational Objectives was created by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 and is commonly referred to as Bloom’s Taxonomy. Bloom outlined six main categories of cognitive learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In 2001, the category names were revised from nouns to verbs. Figure 3 is a diagram showing the Bloom’s Taxonomy for the cognitive domain arranged as a pyramid from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills.

Figure 3. Bloom’s Taxonomy

# Bloom's Taxonomy



Source: Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

When writing student learning objectives and ensuring academic rigor, it's helpful to refer to Bloom's Taxonomy. Referring to various learning levels from Bloom's Taxonomy will ensure that you are addressing the appropriate level of learning in your learning outcome statements.

Degree program learning outcomes are published in the undergraduate and graduate bulletins after they have been approved by the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics (OIRAA). Any program that wants to make changes to its learning outcomes should access UofSC's Academic Programs Proposal System (APPS), also known as the New APPS or Course Inventory Management (CIM). APPS is the University's system of record for course and program approvals. Updates to program learning outcomes are included in the workflow for program changes. Just enter the learning outcomes requiring modification into APPS, and your request will be routed to OIRAA for approval. OIRAA will review the proposed learning outcomes for the SMART model components listed above. Programs with approved learning outcomes are automatically updated in the bulletins.

The undergraduate and graduate studies bulletins are updated in accordance with the Academic Planning Calendar. On December 15 of each year, the bulletins are "frozen" and become the bulletin of record for the upcoming academic year (ACAF 3.50). Therefore, any requested changes to student learning outcomes must be requested by the end of November for review and approval.

## Measures and Criteria

Assessment measures are student work products that have been selected for evaluation of proficiency or mastery of a learning outcome. Examples of assessment measures include papers, presentations, critiques, case studies, exam results, essays, practica evaluations, etc. All of these are considered direct assessment measures because they are tangible items that can be

collected, gathered, summarized, and analyzed. Alternatively, indirect assessment methods are indicators of student knowledge acquisition, but do not include tangible evidence of student learning. For example, consider a comprehensive exam for a doctoral program. A direct assessment using the comprehensive exam would be to identify topics covered in the comprehensive exam that evidence student mastery of a particular learning outcome. An indirect assessment using the comprehensive exam would be to report the number of students who pass the comprehensive exam by a particular point in the program. Certainly, reporting the number of students passing the comprehensive exam reflects students' progression through the program. However, because there is variation across programs regarding the content and rigor of a comprehensive exam, a direct assessment of students' performance on the comprehensive exam with a comprehensive exam rubric and report on students' performance on rubric criteria.

Suppose a program selects a written paper as an assessment measure, the next step is for the program to determine a target or benchmark for acceptable performance on the paper. If the paper will be graded, or is worth a specific number of points, the program will indicate the percentage of students expected to earn the target grade or points on the paper. Remember, course grades are not acceptable assessment measures. For more details on why course grades are not acceptable assessment measures please see, "Do Grades make the Grade in Program Assessment?" contained in the appendix.

Lastly, the program would set some useful criteria for student performance on the paper and arrive at a statement similar to the following, "It is expected that 75% of our students will score adequate or better on the grammar and mechanics component of the individual paper."

### **Methods**

The methods section of the assessment plan is primarily focused on how the program oversees its assessment and program evaluation activities. This section describes how assessment measures are collected, how often assessment results are collected, how assessment results are analyzed, e. g., aggregated or summarized, who sees the analysis and then what mechanisms are in place for program evaluation, and for revision of the program's curriculum, should student performance results warrant changes.

The aforementioned areas of mission, goals, curriculum, learning outcomes, measures & criteria and methods are what constitute an assessment plan. After these components are established, the program should proceed to implement the plan by coordinating with the instructors of record to collect students' assignments from the various courses and other learning opportunities identified in the curriculum section.

### **The Assessment Report**

The assessment report contains all the aforementioned components of the assessment plan plus two more sections, Results and Use of Results.

### **Results**

The results section reports how students performed on the assessment measures as described in the measures and criteria section of the assessment plan. This section documents that the assessments planned for the program were completed, collected, and analyzed. Do not omit results because the predetermined performance criteria were not met. The only requirements

for this section are results of students' performance with respect to the benchmarks in the measures and criteria sections and whether or not the criteria were met.

### **Use of Results**

This is the final section of the assessment report which describes the program's response to the assessment results. This response should come as a result of implementing the analysis, sharing and oversight activities as described in the methods section. Ideally, in order to complete this section, program administrators should meet with program faculty to discuss assessment results and determine what impact(s) the assessment results have on student learning outcomes. It is also important to recommend needed changes for improvement to course delivery, curriculum, or assessment. Consideration should be given to the implications of assessment results on future assessment activities. Notes from these meetings are summarized in the assessment results section of the assessment report.

## **UofSC's Degree Program Assessment Reporting Process**

### **Reporting Timeframes**

Prior to the Fall of 2017 colleges adhered to an annual assessment reporting cycle. In the summer of 2017, UofSC implemented a new two-year schedule with six terms to report on all program learning outcomes and how assessment findings have been used to improve programs. The move to a new two-year schedule was done primarily so that colleges could complete all the steps in the assessment process, including discussing the impact of assessment results on future program activities and/or curricula.

Four assessment schedules, referred to as assessment "groups" and were developed by the Vice Provost and Dean of Faculty whereby colleges could select a term for reporting. With respect to the expectations for reporting results to SACSCOC every five years, the four schedules were developed so that each degree program would complete all stages of the assessment process for each of its learning outcomes twice in a five-year period. The first completion of all assessment stages (years 1-2) is referred to as Cycle 1 with years 3-4, comprising Cycle 2. Regardless of the schedule selected, all programs began Cycle 1 in the Fall of 2017, with alternating end dates for assessment reporting beginning in the Fall of 2018. Table 2. best represents the new assessment reporting time frames and future reporting dates.

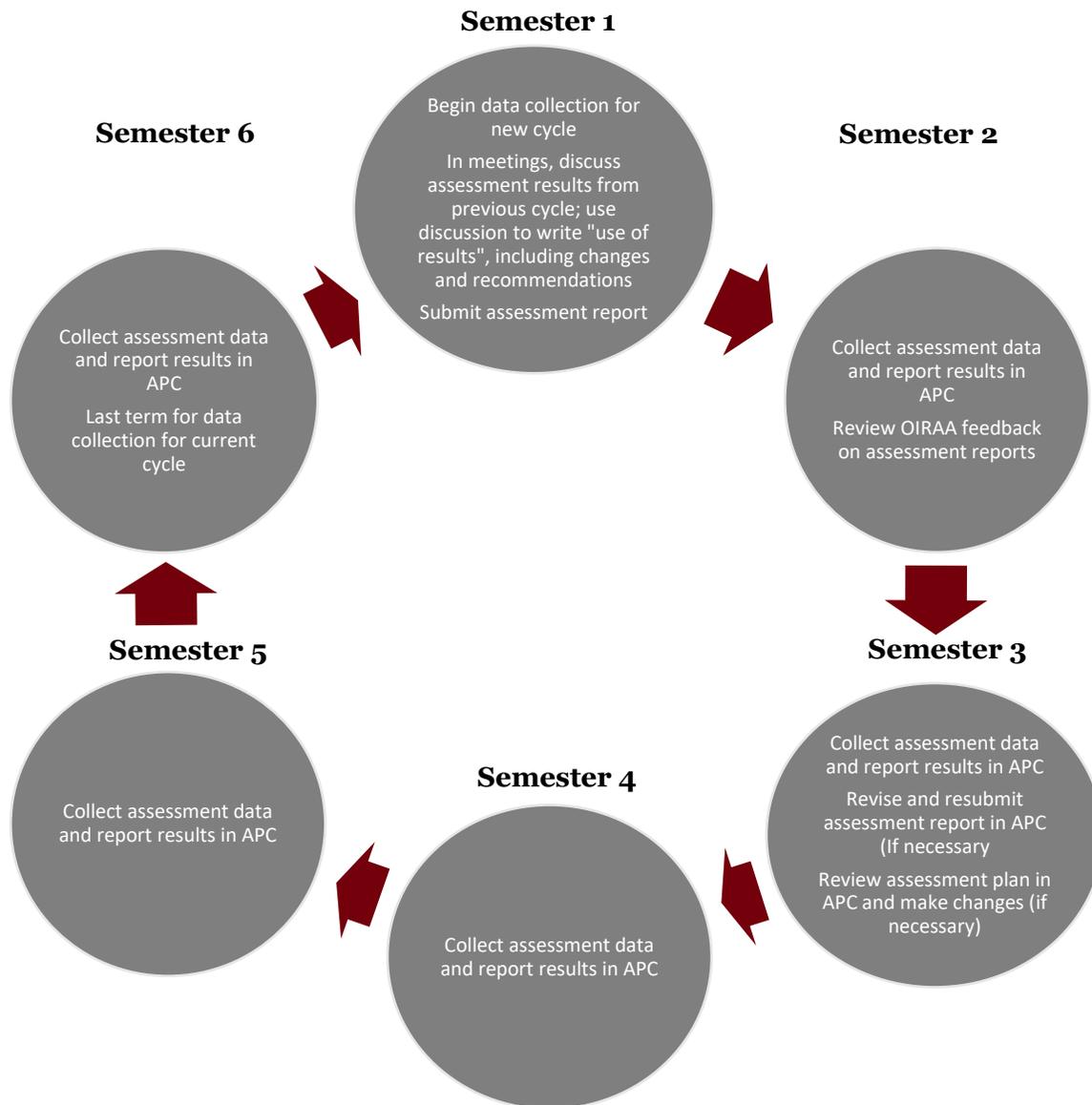
Table 2. Degree Program Assessment Reporting Schedule

<b>Group</b>	<b>Future Reporting Dates</b>
<b>Group 1</b>	Fall Odd Numbered Years
<b>Group 2</b>	Spring Even Numbered Years
<b>Group 3</b>	Fall of Even Numbered Years
<b>Group 4</b>	Spring of Odd Numbered Years

The university's assessment process requires all academic programs to submit two assessment reports in a five-year period. To have assessment results available for reporting, programs must

be diligent about collecting assessment results each semester. However, there is no requirement to submit an assessment report each semester. Instead, programs are to collect assessment results and store student performance in the University's assessment system, Assessment Plan Composer (APC). Figure 4 illustrates the steps that programs should take over the course of the two-year (six academic terms) cycle.

Figure 4: Six-Term Program Assessment Steps



## **Assessment Reporting using Assessment Plan Composer**

In 2007, the university developed an internal application, Assessment Plan Composer (APC), as a repository for assessment plans and the resulting actions programs have taken in response to assessment results. APC has been extremely useful to the degree program assessment process in that it serves as a single site that can be accessed by all colleges to document their assessment processes. Using a static template to report on assessment processes, all reports are similar regardless of degree program.

The key benefit of Assessment Plan Composer (APC) is that it offers various levels of access to university administrators, and this helps OIRAA administrators manage and track the progress colleges are making with their assessment reports. Access can also be shared with external SACSCOC reviewers who are responsible for auditing the university's assessment records.

## **Noncompliance**

It is critical that all degree programs assess student learning and report assessment results as outlined in policy [ACAF 3.00 Assessment of Student Learning](#)

From past experience, OIRAA has identified the main reasons programs become non-complaint with ACAF 3.00 as follows:

- 1) Failure to develop an assessment plan for a new or restarted program
- 2) Failure to submit an assessment report
- 3) Failure to revise and resubmit reports returned by OIRAA for revision

So that the university remains in compliance with its SACSCOC reporting requirements, it is necessary to institute a series of repercussions for programs that are non-compliant. The escalation steps in Table 3 illustrate the repercussions for programs that are not compliant with the university's assessment requirements.

Table 3. Escalation Process for Non-Compliant Programs

Step	Action	What Happens?	Plan Writer Response Time	Dates for Reports Due in the Fall	Dates for Reports due in the Spring
Step 0	None	Nothing- Report is submitted on time	Not applicable	Dec. 1	May 1
Step 1	Notification/ Warning 1	The OIRAA Assessment Coordinator (OIRAA-AC) contacts plan writer by email	Two weeks	Jan. 3	Aug. 16
Step 2	Notification/ Warning 2	OIRAA-AC contacts AAC rep by email for assistance and contacts plan writer by email and phone	Two weeks	Jan. 17	Aug. 30
Step 3	Notification 1 of AAC Rep and IE Assistant Director	OIRAA-AC notifies the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness (ADIE) by email and copies AAC member	One week	Jan.31	Sept. 13
Step 4	Notification 1 of OIRAA IE Director and Dept. Chair/Asst. Dean	ADIE notifies the Director of IE (DIE), and the Dept. Chair/Program Director by phone and email that responses have not been received nor has the issue been resolved and that escalation will ensue; AAC member is copied on email	Two weeks	Feb. 7	Sept. 20
Step 5	Notification 2 of Dept. Chair/Asst. Dean	ADIE generates memo to Asst. Dean responsible for program by phone and email; AAC member, IE director, and department chair/program director are copied by email	Two weeks	Feb. 21	Oct. 4
Step 6	Escalation to Executive Director OIRAA and Dean	OIRAA's Executive Director (ED) contacts Dean to inform, discuss and attempt to resolve issue; Asst. Dean, IE director, and department chair/program director are copied by email	One week	March 7	Oct. 18
Step 7	Escalation to Vice Provost and Dean of Faculty	The ED informs the Office of the Provost of all steps taken to resolve issue	Office of the Provost determines appropriate resolution	March 14	Oct. 25

### **Non-complaint Action 1: Failure to develop an assessment plan**

All existing degree programs should have an assessment plan for which the program is actively collecting assessment results each semester. New programs are those that have begun accepting students or have been restarted within the current academic year. New programs, and recently restarted programs have one year to develop an assessment plan. This allows programs to gain experience with the delivery of the new program, which is essential to successful assessment, e.g., student inputs, faculty proficiency, appropriateness of assignments and activities. New programs are given one year to solidify their program learning outcomes and measures and to determine how oversight of the assessment process will occur. In year two, programs are expected to draft the assessment plan and begin collecting assessment results.

Within nine months of being notified by Office of Academic Programs that a new program has begun, OIRAA will create a link for the program in Assessment Plan Composer. At this time, OIRAA will reach out to the Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) Representative for the college to learn who is responsible for the program's assessment plan, i.e., the plan writer. OIRAA then obtains the contact information, including email address of the plan writer and creates an APC username and password for the plan writer. Next, OIRAA will notify the plan writer of the APC login information and link created for the program. One year later, OIRAA will log into APC and access the link for the assessment plan to see if any components of an assessment plan have been created. If no plan has been started OIRAA will proceed through the escalation steps outlined above.

### **Non-compliant Action 2: Failure to submit an assessment report**

Reporting assessment results requires collecting evidence of student performance on student learning outcomes, analyzing student performance, reviewing and sharing assessment results and responding to assessment results. Specifically, these activities make up the Measures and Criteria, Methods, Results and Use of Results sections of the assessment report. Each of these sections should be completed for all program learning outcomes and then submitted in APC. To reiterate, four assessment schedules were selected to allow for programs to submit two assessment reports in a five-year period. It is imperative that programs submit assessment reports according to the selected schedule. When programs fail to submit assessment reports on time, it affects OIRAA's ability to provide the required feedback for programs to proceed on to the next assessment cycle. This increases the likelihood that their subsequent assessment reports will also be received after the deadline. In addition, the escalation process outlined above begins for programs that are more than two weeks removed from the original submission deadline.

### **Non-compliant Action 3: Failure to revise an assessment plan**

The final major infraction is for programs with assessment reports requiring revision. To be clear, while OIRAA reviews and pays careful attention to the quality of the assessment reports submitted, reports are not returned for revision unless one or more of the major components are omitted, course grades are used for assessment or if there are major inconsistencies between planned measures and actual results. OIRAA has committed to providing feedback on assessment reports within 30 days of submission. This feedback can be found in APC via the clipboard icon that details the specific areas of the report that require revision. Areas needing revision are clearly marked "U" for "Unacceptable." Reports requiring revision should be revised within 30 days of receiving a "revisions requested" notification via APC. Essentially a

report requiring revisions where revisions are never made results in the report assuming the same status as a report that was not submitted by the original report deadline. For this reason, failure to revise the report and resubmit it to OIRAA within 30 days also begins the escalation process outlined above.

### **Training and Consultation**

Understanding that this document may not address all the concerns expressed by those engaged in degree program assessment at the University of South Carolina, the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) offers training and consultation about effective assessment practices. If a program or college believes it would benefit from having OIRAA's Assessment Coordinator visit and discuss this process with plan writers and faculty, OIRAA is happy to do so. In addition, OIRAA will publish the calendar of due dates for plans and reports and provide templates and other assessment resources on the OIRAA website.

# Appendix

## Curriculum Alignment

**Curriculum** addresses the “teach it” aspect of assessment, where specific opportunities are identified within the program where students will be exposed to the necessary materials to obtain the knowledge and skills associated with the goal and its associated learning outcome(s). Learning opportunities can include specific class assignments and assignments as well as any co-curricular activities. These opportunities are ideal assessment points within a program.

### How do I share the connection between the program's curriculum and the assessment of the program?

- Refrain from listing all courses required for the degree.
- Identify the learning opportunities that support the goals for the program.
- Include the course number and title.

Curricular opportunities can be expressed as a statement, such as in the example below:

“Students will gain the required computer skills in the program by completing CSCE 101 (Introduction to Computer Concepts).”

Another option for communicating how the program’s curriculum supports the goals for the program, is with a curriculum alignment matrix, also known as a curriculum map.

### Curriculum Mapping

Curriculum maps are very helpful in demonstrating where in the program’s curriculum learning outcomes are being addressed. Mapping” program outcomes to course outcomes shows how students develop skills and knowledge in courses that are required for their programs of study.

### How do I develop a basic curriculum map?

- Develop a table with two axes, one pertaining to program learning outcomes, the other to the learning opportunities
- Use appropriate program learning outcomes in the course assessment plan.
- Identify the connection between the learning outcomes and where students are exposed to the material.

## Example of a basic curriculum map

Learning Outcomes	Course/Activity 1	Course/Activity 2	Course/Activity 3	Course/Activity 4	Course/Activity 5	Course/Activity 6
Outcome 1			X			
Outcome 2	X					
Outcome 3					X	
Outcome 4	X			X		
Outcome 5		X				X

If the program offers students repeated exposure to program learning outcomes in order to build on previous learning opportunities or, to reinforce learning over the course of the program, these can be expressed in the form of a complex curriculum map.

	Learning Outcome a	Learning Outcome b	Learning Outcome c	Learning Outcome d	Learning Outcome e
Course #1	L			L	
Course #2	M		L	M	
Course #3	M				L
Course #4		L	M		
Course #5		M		M	
Course #6	H	H			M
Course #7				H	H
Course #8			H		H

Note: L, M, and H describe the extent to which students experience the learning outcome. L = Low emphasis on the learning outcome; M = Moderate emphasis; H = High emphasis. Every course listed should contribute to at least one learning outcome.

## Template for a complex curriculum map with program goals

	Introductory Course	Research Methods	Advanced Content Course A	Laboratory / Practicum Course	Advanced Content Course B	Advanced Content Course C	Advanced Content Course D	Capstone Course
<b>Goal 1: Content</b>								
SLO 1: Disciplinary knowledge base (models and theories)	Introduced		Reinforced		Reinforced	Reinforced	Reinforced	Mastery / Assessed
SLO 2: Disciplinary methods		Introduced		Reinforced		Reinforced		Mastery / Assessed
SLO 3: Disciplinary applications	Introduced		Reinforced		Reinforced		Reinforced	Mastery / Assessed
<b>Goal 2: Critical Thinking</b>								
SLO 4: Analysis and use of evidence		Introduced		Reinforced	Reinforced		Reinforced	Mastery / Assessed
SLO 5: Evaluation, selection, and use of sources of information	Introduced	Reinforced		Reinforced		Reinforced		Mastery / Assessed
<b>Goal 3: Communication</b>								
SLO 6: Written communication skills	Introduced	Reinforced		Reinforced		Reinforced		Mastery / Assessed
SLO 7: Oral communication skills		Introduced	Reinforced		Reinforced	Mastery / Assessed		
<b>Goal 4: Integrity / Values</b>								
SLO 8: Disciplinary ethical standards		Introduced		Reinforced	Reinforced			Mastery / Assessed
SLO 9: Academic integrity	Introduced	Reinforced	Reinforced	Reinforced		Reinforced		Mastery / Assessed

Sample Curriculum Map(Level of Skill) Updated: 24 January 2017

Source: University of West Florida, Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

<http://uwf.edu/cutla/>

## Learning Outcome Instructions

Learning outcomes are much more specific than goal statements. Learning outcomes describe the measurable skills, abilities, knowledge, or values that students should be able to do or demonstrate upon completion of the academic program. Learning outcomes should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented, and **T**ime-bound.

Guidelines:

- Identify 3-5 learning outcomes that are specific, measurable, and attainable. Select learning outcomes that faculty deem most important for all program graduates to achieve upon degree completion.
- More than 5 learning outcomes can be included if required by program accrediting agencies, or if faculty believe the learning outcomes are very important for all graduates to achieve. With numerous (5+), substantial learning outcomes, faculty may decide to assess sets of outcomes on a rotating cycle (e.g. with a total of 12 learning outcomes, assessing a set of 4 outcomes each year, with a 3 year cycle), while others may prefer to assess all learning outcomes annually.
- More advanced degree programs should have more advanced learning outcomes (and different criteria).

Action Verb List:

The verbs listed below can be used to create student learning outcomes. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) have adapted Bloom's model to fit the needs of today's classroom by employing more outcome-oriented language, workable objectives, and changing nouns to active verbs.

<u>Remember:</u>	<u>Understand:</u>	<u>Apply:</u>	<u>Analyze:</u>	<u>Evaluate:</u>	<u>Create:</u>
Arrange	Classify	Apply	Analyze	Appraise	Arrange
Define	Convert	Change	Appraise	Argue	Assemble
Describe	Defend	Choose	Categorize	Assess	Combine
Identify	Distinguish	Compute	Compare	Conclude	Compose
Label	Explain	Demonstrate	Contrast	Defend	Construct
List	Estimate	Dramatize	Criticize	Evaluate	Create
Match	Interpret	Employ	Diagram	Judge	Design
Outline	Infer	Illustrate	Differentiate	Justify	Develop
Recognize	Paraphrase	Manipulate	Discriminate	Support	Formulate
Recall	Summarize	Modify	Distinguish	Value	Generate
Repeat	Translate	Operate	Examine		Plan
Reproduce		Practice	Experiment		Synthesize
		Produce	Question		Write
		Solve	Model		
		Write	Test		

Examples:

Students will design a research project using appropriate scientific theory and methodology.

## Do Grades Make the Grade for Program Assessment?

Retrieved from

<http://www.abet.org/Linked%20Documents-UPDATE/Assessment/Assessment%20Tips4.pdf>

Do Grades Make the Grade for Program Assessment?

Assessment Tips With Gloria Rogers

One of the most common questions from faculty when discussing outcomes assessment is, “We are already assessing students in courses; why can't we just use student grades as an indication of what our students know or can do?”

*Grades represent the extent to which a student has successfully met the faculty member's requirements and expectations for a course.* Because many factors contribute to an assigned grade, it is almost impossible to make inferences about what a student knows or can do by only looking at the grades for a course.

In outcomes assessment at the program level, the primary question that needs to be answered is, “Can students demonstrate the ability to perform at an acceptable level in each of the program outcomes?” Program assessment focuses on providing evidence that students can demonstrate knowledge or skill directly linked to specific program outcomes. Grades *per se* do not provide that information.

One reason why course grades are not appropriate for program assessment is that *course content for any given subject may vary among faculty members teaching the same course.* When developing a course, the faculty member has to make many decisions. These include decisions about course content and course management. When deciding what topics and concepts to include in the course, the faculty member needs a clear view of how the course is aligned with other courses in the curriculum (e.g., introductory, elective, required, lower/ upper division, major, or service course). Decisions about course content are constrained by several factors: the amount of time the faculty member has to deliver the course, the knowledge and skills that students bring to the course, and the expectations other faculty have for learning brought to follow-on courses. Content may also vary with the individual faculty member's beliefs about what is important (topics, concepts, and levels of cognition students must demonstrate for each concept), the textbook chosen, and the faculty member's expertise and interests. Decisions are also made about how the course is managed, for instance the mode of delivery, number and types of tests, attendance policy, and grade structure. All of these variables contribute to the grades students receive, further confounding the ability to interpret the relationship of the grade to specific student knowledge or abilities.

Another reason why grades do not provide adequate information for program assessment is that *the grading policy in any course is dependent on the individual faculty member.* This is generally true even when there are multiple sections of the same course with common exams. Some faculty choose to give (or take away) points or partial credit for things that are not related to student learning (for example, attendance, class participation, and course evaluation). Some faculty grade on a curve; others have a fixed standard. Letter grades or numeric scores reflect the student's relative standing within the class or among other tests – relative to a set scale or relative to other students. They do not, however, tell the person interpreting the assigned grade/score what the student knows or can do, nor do they provide information about what topics or concepts he or she did not understand or how his or her learning can be improved.

Assessing program learning outcomes for the curriculum differs from assessing classroom learning outcomes in several ways, most notably the following:

When developing a curriculum, faculty collectively consider the objectives<sup>1</sup> their students will need to achieve after graduation. Once the objectives are identified, faculty decide what students should know or be able to do by the time of graduation in order to meet them. After the program outcomes<sup>2</sup> are set, the curriculum is developed/modified to represent a well articulated and aligned set of major and general education courses. Students are introduced to key concepts in the lower division courses. Then these concepts are applied in courses throughout the rest of the curriculum, as students move from knowing and understanding a concept to developing an ability to apply that knowing and understanding in various ways, in multiple settings. This process illustrates the cumulative learning effect of specific concepts and skills taught through individual courses. The assessment of program outcomes should reflect student-achievement-specific outcomes as a culmination of several classes and activities throughout the curriculum.

Just as faculty cannot include in a course everything associated with the subject matter of that course, a program cannot include in its curriculum every concept or skill set that is in the realm of possibilities for that curriculum. As in course preparation, several decisions need to be made by program faculty when determining the program outcomes to be assessed and managing the assessment process. These include deciding what learning outcomes are central to achieving the objectives, how many and what performance criteria<sup>3</sup> will be assessed for each outcome, where in the curriculum students are getting the opportunity to demonstrate the desired performance criteria associated with the outcome, how often the outcomes will be assessed, how the outcomes are going to be assessed, and how the data gathered can be used for program improvement. As in classroom assessment, these decisions are constrained by factors related to the context of the program. Some of these factors include the nature of the objectives, type of institution/program, available resources and time, and make up of students served.

For program assessment, a numeric score that is directly linked to students' performance on a specific performance criteria can be used as evidence of program learning outcomes. For example, for the outcome, "Students have an understanding of ethical responsibility," one of the performance criteria could be, "Students will demonstrate the ability to evaluate the ethical dimensions of a problem in their engineering discipline." Faculty could develop a rubric to score student performance. A rubric is a descriptive rating scale with several different observable levels of performance possible for each performance criteria being assessed. Each performance level is described and assigned a numeric score (for example, 1 = exemplary, 2 = good, 3 = adequate, 4 = marginal, and 5 = unacceptable). The number of points on the scale will depend on the level of cognition or skill that the outcome requires – but that is a discussion for a later time. Reporting the percent of students who score at each of the levels provides data that are linked directly to the anticipated outcome and focus the evaluation and strategies for improvement. It is a numerical score that provides a great deal of information about what students know or can do – but it is not a grade.

Grades will continue to be an important part of the higher education culture and should be understood for what they represent. However, for program assessment, where the purpose of the assessment is to provide information about student learning at the program level, grades in courses generally have little use. This is not to say that students cannot demonstrate program outcomes in a classroom setting. But, the measure used to assess those outcomes should be used consistently, should reflect specific student knowledge or skills, and should be directly linked to specific performance criteria. *It is important to remember that the focus is not a score or grade, but the student knowledge or skill that is represented by that score or grade.*

<sup>1</sup>Objective here is defined as the expected accomplishments of graduates during the first few years after graduation.

<sup>2</sup>Outcome here is defined as what a student knows or can do by the time of graduation.

<sup>3</sup>Performance criteria here are defined as the specific, measurable statements identifying the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or behavior students must demonstrate as indicators of achieving the outcome.



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