

CREATING A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN

Frostburg State University
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CAVEAT ONE:

Program assessment plans are not static concepts. They should be under constant review and revision in response to what you have learned, either about the students or about the process itself (simply put, it's never permanent).

CAVEAT TWO:

Incorporating student learning assessment into the University's academic program will occur incrementally as the result of faculty engagement. My best advice is to (1) understand that student learning assessment is a permanent part of our landscape, (2) build your approach slowly and consistently, and (3) ask questions, because FSU has a wealth of assessment resources in faculty who are well-versed in strategies and techniques as a result of accreditation requirements or personal commitment.

SUGGESTION:

This "step by step" guide was created because many of you have said to me, "Just tell me HOW to do this." As a result, I have compiled suggestions from several different resources. However, I strongly encourage you to review, at the very least, the suggestions included on the "FSU Assessment Primer" CD under "Department Resources." These articles highlight and expand upon several of the suggestions offered in the pages that follow.

And, when all else fails...give me a call (ext. 4489).

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Assistant to the Provost

Creating a Program Assessment Plan

- I. Review your program's learning goals.

- A. **IMPORTANT: YOU CONCEIVABLY COULD DEVELOP MORE THAN ONE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN IF YOU OFFER MORE THAN ONE PROGRAM.**
 - B. Do the learning goals state, in action-oriented, assessable language, what your graduates will be able to show that they have learned?
 - C. Reality check: If your goals are not written correctly, you cannot build a legitimate assessment plan.
- II. Cross-reference learning goals to Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals.**
- A. You are NOT expected to support every goal.
 - B. Identify institutional goals that are most clearly supported by and appropriate for your major.
 - C. This step is important because ultimately we will have to be able to show clear connections from the course level through the department up to the overarching goals and back down again.
- III. Create a grid (see attached sample) that cross-references your program goals to the course or courses or other activities (e.g., internships, undergraduate research, etc.) that will focus on students' progress toward attaining that goal.**
- A. Note sequencing of courses and building of skills in relation to overall learning goals.
 - B. Some courses may support only one goal, while others could support two or more.
 - C. In your cross-referencing, if you have either a goal that is not being met or a course that appears not to contribute, then you have to decide: Is the goal inappropriate? Does the course need updating? Do either (or both) need to be completely revised or eliminated?
- IV. Inventory what you are already doing as an assessment and factor this into the conversations that follow.**
- A. In many programs, assessments are already in place (e.g., learning rubrics) that can be used to support your goals.
 - B. Often you will be able to use "current practices" as solid foundations for your assessment plan.
- V. Decide what methods you will use to assess your student learning goals.**
- A. At this point, understanding the difference between direct and indirect assessment is very important.
 1. *Direct assessments* measure students' achievements against a pre-established set of criteria and allow observation of students' abilities.
 2. *Indirect assessments* include self-reflections (surveys, students' reports of learning attained) and course grades.
 3. Your assessment plan can include a combination of both types, but direct assessment strategies should be the primary focus.
 - B. Look again at the grid you developed regarding placement of goals within your course structure. Do any course-embedded activities lend themselves to development of an assessment rubric that can serve "double duty" (i.e., both as a grading tool and an instrument for assessment?)
 - C. Now, decide at what level you expect your students to achieve to demonstrate the outcome that you desire. Options include locally-established benchmarks, performance against national norms, etc. Be sure that you agree as a department as to WHY these standards have been set.
 - D. Finally, if you are going to use "home-grown" instruments as your assessment tools, you have to decide who is going to create them, and you have to allow time for validating the instrument(s).

VI. Decide what goals will be assessed when.

- A. **IMPORTANT:** There is no expectation that you assess ALL your goals ALL the time with ALL your students.
- B. Understanding **WHEN** you want information is vital in establishing an assessment cycle—for two major reasons.
 - 1. Are you interested in summative assessments only (e.g., at the end of a course or at the end of the end of a student's academic career)? Do you also want to engage in formative assessments (i.e., during a student's degree progression?) This decision affects the type of information the assessments reveal and, in turn, how that information is used.
 - 2. Some goals have direct resource implications, so this aspect should be of primary concern when establishing priorities for an assessment cycle.
- C. Decide if any goal demands assessment every semester or every year. Then make a decision regarding sample size. All seniors? All students in "x" course? A random sample of students in all sections of "x" courses?
- D. Now, plot out an assessment cycle for all your goals based on the decisions you have made thus far, making the same decisions about sample size. Some goals can be assessed once a year; others can be addressed every other year, or every third semester, etc.

VII. Establish the "how" of collecting and organizing evidence.

- A. Will an individual faculty member or a multi-member team be responsible for managing the assessment program and making sure that assessments are completed?
- B. Who will actually collect the raw evidence? Is this the job of a faculty member, or can you train your administrative assistant to take this responsibility (much in the same manner that many administrative assistants manage the course evaluation process)?
- C. What are the resource implications of the administration of your assessment program (e.g., faculty time)?

VIII. Decide when and how and by whom the evidence will be analyzed.

- A. The best approach regarding "when": As soon as possible after the assessment has been completed. If the results are to be used legitimately in decisions related to continuous program improvement or to resource allocation, then you need the most current information you can get.
- B. Will review and analysis of the evidence be limited to your faculty? How about alumni, individuals from academic support services, other faculty in other departments?

IX. Use the results of the assessments to inform your decision-making about program improvement.

- A. Decide how much evidence is needed to support decisions in response to a particular goal (i.e., from "x" number of students or over a span of "x" number of semesters or years).
- B. Discussion about the results, in order to be most effective, should include all department faculty for obvious reasons:
 - 1. *Communication:* Assessments affect the entire program, so decisions cannot be made in a vacuum.
 - 2. *Inter-course impact:* Assessment outcomes may reveal a deficiency in students' ability to learn certain concepts, and the resulting remedy may require changes to an established sequence of learning that involves several courses.

3. *Resource implications:* The entire department should be aware of—and, ideally, support—decisions made or recommendations forwarded regarding resources (either available or requested) that have been identified as the result of assessment efforts.
- C. Be sure to document the decisions made.
 1. What assessment results were the most revealing?
 2. What changes were agreed upon?
 3. What schedule was established to effect change as a result of findings of the assessment?
- X. Complete the necessary revisions/modifications as part of a strategy of continuous program improvement.**
- XI. Now, repeat the assessment cycle with the changes in place.**
- A. Agree on new/modified outcomes.
 - B. Gather evidence.
 - C. Analyze evidence.
 - D. Implement change as necessary.

SAMPLE EVALUATION GRID

(identifying where in students' courses of study learning related to department goals takes place)

COURSE ►	Intro Course	Intro Course	Mid-Level Course	Mid-Level Course	Capstone
GOAL ▼					
Identify fundamental theories	X	X			
Critique current trends			X		X
Demonstrate basic techniques		X			
Construct experiment based on disciplinary standards				X	X
Evaluate research				X	X

A S S E S S M E N T G U I D E

PART I: DETERMINING YOUR DEPARTMENT'S OR PROGRAM'S EXPECTATIONS

A. STATE EXPECTED OUTCOMES

VERY important to use action verbs!

For example:

- Derive supportable inferences from statistical and graphical data
- Analyze a social problem from interdisciplinary perspectives
- Evaluate proposed solutions to a community issue

B. IDENTIFY WHERE EXPECTED OUTCOMES ARE ADDRESSED

For example, in

- Courses
- Programs
- Services
- Internships
- Community Service Projects
- Work Experiences
- Independent Studies

C. DETERMINE METHODS AND CRITERIA TO ASSESS OUTCOMES

Examples:

- Test
- In-class writing sample
- In-class analysis of a problem
- In-class collaborative problem solving project
- Portfolio
- Performance
- Simulation
- Focus Group

D. STATE DEPARTMENT'S OR PROGRAM'S LEVEL OF EXPECTED PERFORMANCE

Examples:

- Numerical score on a national examination
- Numerical score on a licensure examination
- Holistic score on ability to solve a mathematical problem
- Mastery level score on a culminating project
- Mastery level score on writing samples

E. IDENTIFY AND COLLECT BASELINE INFORMATION

By means of:

- Standardized tests
- Locally designs tests or other instruments
- In-class writing exercise
- In-class case study
- Portfolio
- Performance

A S S E S S M E N T G U I D E

PART II. DETERMINING TIME, IDENTIFYING COHORT(S), AND ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY

A. Determine Who You Will Assess

For example:

- ⇒ All students
- ⇒ Student cohorts, such as
 - At-risk students
 - Historically underrepresented students
 - Students with SATs over 1200
 - Traditional-aged students
 - Certificate-seeking students
 - International students
 - First-generation students

B. Establish a Schedule for Assessment

For example:

- ⇒ Upon matriculation (or entering the degree program)
- ⇒ At the end of a specific semester
- ⇒ At the completion of a required set of courses
- ⇒ Upon completion of a certain number of credits
- ⇒ Upon program completion
- ⇒ Upon graduation
- ⇒ Upon employment
- ⇒ A number of years after graduation

C. Determine Who Will Interpret Results

For example:

- ⇒ Outside evaluators
 - Representatives from agencies
 - Faculty at neighboring institutions
 - Employers
 - Alumni
- ⇒ Inside evaluators:
 - Librarian on team for natural science majors
 - Student affairs representative on team to assess community service portfolio
 - Interdisciplinary team
 - Assessment Committee
 - Writing Center
 - Academic Support Services
 - Student Affairs

A S S E S S M E N T G U I D E

PART III. INTERPRETING AND SHARING RESULTS TO ENHANCE DEPARTMENTAL/PROGRAMMATIC/INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A. Interpret How Results Will Inform Teaching/Learning and Decision Making

For example:

- ⇒ Revise pedagogy, curricula, sequence of courses
- ⇒ Ensure collective reinforcement of knowledge, abilities, habits of mind by establishing, for example, quantitative reasoning across the curriculum
- ⇒ Design more effective foundation courses
- ⇒ Describe expected outcomes more effectively
- ⇒ Increase connections between in-class and out-of-class learning
- ⇒ Shape department/program decision making, planning, and allocation of resources

B. Determine How and With Whom You Will Share Interpretations

For example:

- ⇒ General Education and Program Assessment Sub-Committee through an annual report
- ⇒ Other departments through a periodic report
- ⇒ University administration (coordinator of assessment, Dean, Provost)
- ⇒ Students through departmental meeting
- ⇒ University planning/budgeting entity (e.g., the President's Cabinet)
- ⇒ Board of Visitors, Board of Regents
- ⇒ Accreditors through self-studies
- ⇒ Program review
- ⇒ News releases to general public

C. Decide How Your Department/Program will Follow Up on Implemented Changes

Repeat the assessment cycle after changes have been implemented:

