

## **Helpful Tips for Running A Successful Program Assessment Meeting**

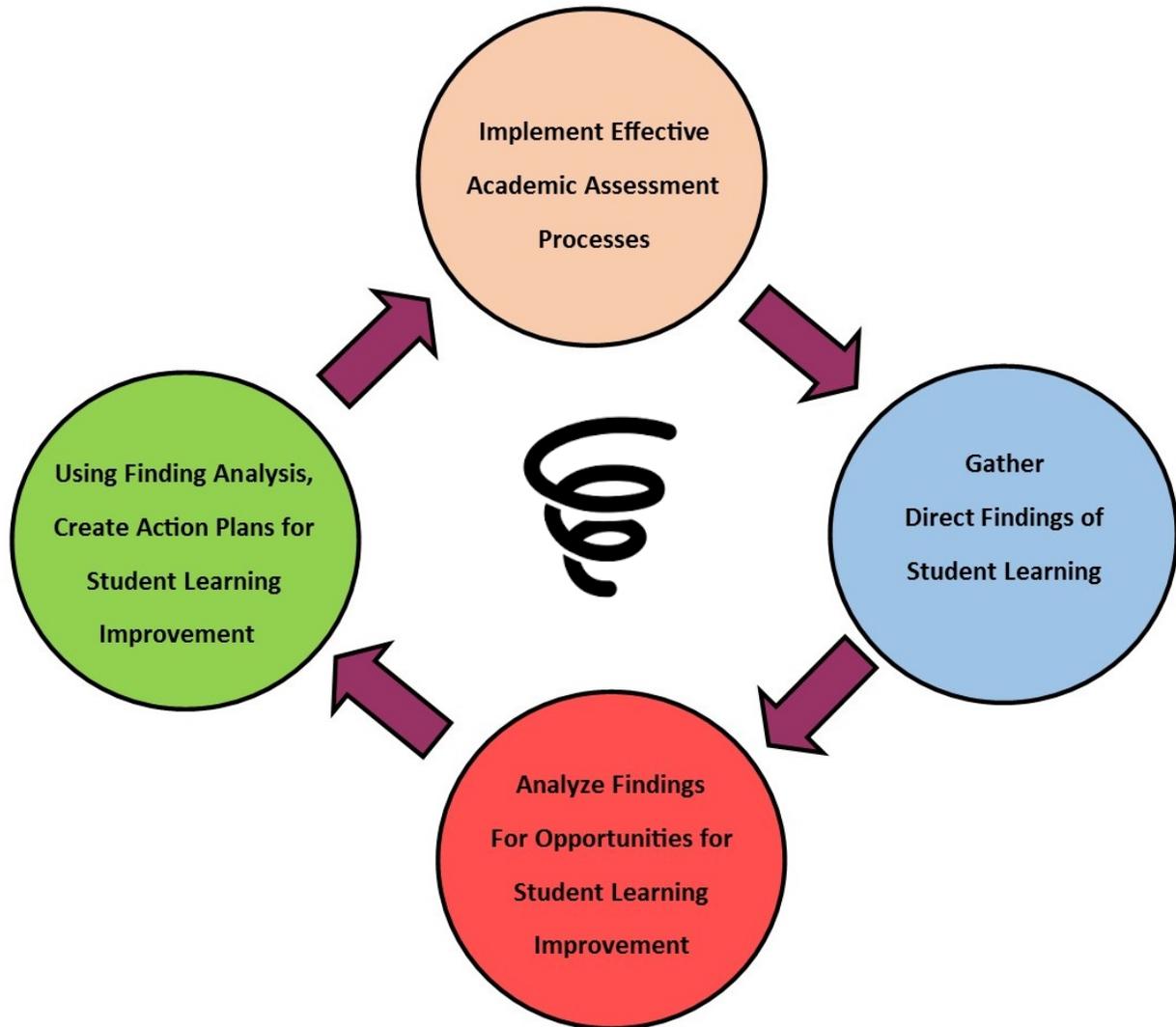
The following guide is designed to offer you a framework for conducting a successful beginning of the year program assessment meeting. These meetings should be collaborative and include all faculty members, as all faculty members should have a voice in the direction of their academic program. To help you prepare for the meeting you, as a program leader, should do the following things:

- Review your current academic assessment plan as detailed in WEAVE.
- Review the “Elements of Effective Assessment Plans” document. You can find this document on the Academic Assessment website:  
<https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/Resources.html>
- Prepare a copy of your program’s assessment plan outcomes, measures, and action plans that you can distribute to your faculty.
- Review the findings for the assessment year just ended (all findings should be entered into WEAVE within two weeks of the end of each semester in which they are gathered) and have these findings available for distribution to your faculty at the meeting.
- Review the annual reviews sent to you by the General Education and Academic Assessment Committee during the previous year.

### **Goal of the Meeting:**

Remember that the purpose of academic assessment is to improve student learning. So academic assessment is not a goal in and of itself, but rather it is a tool, a means, to improving student learning. So your meeting should be focused on examining your assessment processes with eye towards using well-designed assessment plans to gather direct evidence of student learning that you can analyze to create effective action plans that will lead to student learning improvement. This is called Closing-The-Loop and it is the hallmark of good assessment as it ensures that assessment is working towards the goal of student learning improvement.

## The Closing-The-Loop Assessment Model



The Closing-The-Loop process repeats each assessment cycle so that as we create action plans for student learning in one cycle we use the findings we gather in the next cycle to determine if the action plan is working or if we need to create a new action plan. In this sense, you can think of the Closing-The-Loop process as a spiral as each Closing-The-Loop cycle leads into the next Closing-The-Loop cycle.

### Step 1: What do you want for your students?

The most important thing to remember about running an assessment meeting is that the goal of assessment is to provide tools to help faculty create, maintain, and grow academic programs that promote high-level student learning. As such, effective assessment starts by asking three questions:

- When our majors walk across the stage at graduation what do we as faculty want them to know?
- When our majors walk across the stage at graduation what do we as faculty want them to do – i.e. what skills do we want them to have?
- When our majors walk across the stage at graduation what do we as faculty want them to value?

Beginning your assessment meeting by engaging faculty in discussing these three questions will help to guide your conversation on the path to understanding how assessment can be used to help ensure that your graduates have the knowledge, skills, and values you want them to have.

Even if your faculty discuss these ideas regularly, you should begin the discussion here as it allows the opportunity for faculty to collaboratively articulate the key intentions of their academic programs and to discuss how changes in the discipline, faculty, resources, and external needs might have created the need to redefine the program's intentions.

Let these conversations proceed and allow faculty to work towards achieving consensus in answering the three questions. If consensus cannot be achieved this may indicate an area of development the program needs to explore in more depth.

### Step 2: Review the program's current student learning outcomes

Once the faculty have achieved consensus on the answer to the three questions this consensus should be reviewed in light of the program's existing student learning outcomes as detailed in your assessment plan.

Review the program's existing student learning outcomes. Discuss the measures being used in your assessment plan to gather data to determine if these outcomes are being achieved.

Your program's student learning outcomes should be the answer to the three key questions defined in Step 1. In other words, your student learning outcomes should state the key knowledge, skills, and values the faculty defined based on their answers to the three questions in Step 1.

Questions to ask at this time include:

- Do our current assessment plan student learning outcomes still fit our program intentions – as defined in our answer to the three questions in Step 1?
- Do our current assessment plan measures still accurately and relevantly let us assess the particular knowledge, skills, and values we want students to have as expressed in our assessment plan's student learning outcomes?

If your current assessment plan's outcomes do not agree with the consensus the faculty arrived at in answering these three questions, then you may want to modify your program's outcomes for the new assessment year. These changes to the program's assessment plan outcomes should be discussed and agreed upon during the meeting, as they need to be entered into Weave by the end of August.

At this point however, you should first review what you have done in the past year and previous years as that will help you formulate any changes you want to make.

### Step 3: Review the previous year's assessment findings

Share with the faculty the student learning outcomes that were measured in the year just ending. Talk about how these student learning outcomes were assessed – what measures did you use to evaluate whether or not students did in fact know, do, and value the things expressed in your assessment plan's student learning outcomes.

You should have all the findings gathered during the previous Fall, Spring, and Summer sessions available for this discussion.

However, do not just discuss this year's findings but also the trend in these findings over the previous years. This will help provide a long-term perspective on the trajectory of student learning in your program.

If you have multiple campuses or delivery methods at which students can complete half or more of their degree requirements you should compare the findings from the different locations and delivery methods as we want to ensure that your graduates at each campus locations and delivery method know, do, and value the things you deem important.

Questions to ask at this time include:

- What were the findings? Are they triangulated – i.e. measured with two or more different direct measures? If so, do the findings of the triangulated measures show similar results?
- Do we have sub-area data in our findings? If so, what more nuanced information do these factor findings give us?
  - [In other words, this means looking at the line item results in our assessment rubric and not just the overall rubric score.]
- Do the findings show a trend? If so, is the trend going up or down? Why?
- Does the measure being used still accurately reflect the student learning outcome it is being used to assess?
- [For academic programs with multiple campuses or delivery methods at which students can complete half or more of their degree requirements]: How do our different campuses / delivery methods compare? Are we getting similar results in our measures of our student learning outcomes in each place / through each method of delivery?

#### Step 4: Review the action plans the program has been working on

Share with the faculty each of the program's "planned" and "in-progress" action plans as detailed in the program's assessment plan in WEAVE.

Start by reviewing the "in-progress" action plans. Go through each one individually and discuss what the action plan was, what was achieved on it, and what future activity it needs.

Questions to ask at this time for each "in-progress" action plan include:

- What assessment findings led us to create this action plan?
- What was the detailed intention and steps of the action plan?
- What has been accomplished on this action plan?
- What do we hope to achieve with this action plan when it is done?
- What still needs to be done on this action plan?
- How will this be accomplished? Who will do it, how will they do it, and when will they do it?

- When will this action plan be complete?

The answer to these questions for “in-progress” action plans should be entered as part of the description and semester updates within those particular “in-progress” action plans as listed in Weave by the end of August.

Action plans that have been completed should be marked as “complete” and have an update explaining what data was gathered to assess the efficacy of the action plan, what this data showed, and what has been done as a result of this data. This information should be entered as semester updates within these action plans as listed in Weave by the end of August.

You should then review your program’s “planned” action plans as expressed in WEAVE. What are their current statuses? Are they still relevant? Are they still planned?

Questions to ask at this time for each “planned” action plan include:

- What assessment findings led us to create this action plan?
- What is the intention of the action plan?
- Is this action plan still in the planning stage – do we still intend to implement it in the near future?
- If not, then you should answer the following questions:
  - What is keeping us from implementing this in the near future?
  - Are there resources we need to achieve this plan we do not have – what are they?
  - Is this action plan no longer relevant?

Lastly you should discuss (based upon the previous discussion of the program’s student learning outcomes, findings, and “in-progress” and “planned” action plans) if there are new action plans that you need to implement for assessment year starting on September 1. Any changes to the assessment plan’s action plans should be discussed and agreed upon during the meeting, as they need to be entered into Weave by the end of August.

Questions to ask at this time include:

- What did our findings show us about areas we need to improve in?
- What do we think the causes of this may be?
- What can we specifically do to improve these areas?
- How will this be specifically accomplished? Who will do it, how will they do it, and when will they do it?

Once you have discussed the action plans, you should move on to discussing more holistically how your program is doing.

Some important considerations:

- If the findings of any your measures for the year just ending show students are not achieving your student learning outcomes as defined by the targets you set for your measures, the faculty must collaboratively agree upon a new “in-progress” student learning improvement action plan to be implemented beginning with the assessment year which starts on Sept. 1. These changes to the assessment plan’s action plans should be discussed and agreed upon during the meeting, as they need to be entered into Weave by the end of August.
- If you had an action plan, implemented it, and your subsequent assessment findings show the action plan was correlated with student learning improvement such that you decide to permanently adopt the action plan as an ongoing standard practice, you should mark the action plan as “complete” and enter an update explaining what your data showed, stating that you have adopted this as standard practice, and explaining why you have made this a standard practice.
- If you have an action plan, implemented it, and your subsequent assessment findings show the action was not correlated with student learning improvement you should discuss what your findings showed and then discuss what you are doing in response. This could be revising the existing action plan by modifying it based upon your analysis of your assessment findings in an attempt to improve its efficacy. Alternatively, it could also mean ending this action plan (i.e. marking it “complete”) and creating a new action plan to improve student learning based upon your analysis of your assessment findings.
- Keep in mind that as we are seeking continuous improvement each program should always have at least one in progress action item designed to improve student learning.

Lastly you should discuss (based upon the previous discussion of the program's student learning outcomes, findings, and "in-progress" and "planned" action plans) if there are new action plans that you need to implement for assessment year starting on September 1. Any changes to the assessment plan's action plans should be discussed and agreed upon during the meeting, as they need to be entered into Weave by the end of August.

#### Step 5: Review your measures and targets

Having reviewed your student learning outcomes and findings for the previous year and having made any necessary modifications to your student learning outcomes, you should now examine your measures.

You need to ensure that each of your student learning outcomes is assessed using at least two different direct measures. A direct measure is an artifact of student work such as a paper, presentation, portfolio, internship evaluation, etc. that allows you to isolate and assess student learning related to the particular knowledge, skill, or value contained in your student learning outcome.

This cannot be achieved using course or assignment grades as they are not measures of particular skills but rather are holistic evaluations of a broad set of skills. However, assessment findings can be embedded as part of an overall assignment or examination grade by using a rubric with categories and line items divided by skill area related to the student learning outcome or by compiling subareas scores for only those examination questions or project components that apply to a particular student learning outcome.

Each measure of an outcome also needs to have a meaningful target. Remember the target is what you want your graduates to achieve. Typically you would want to express your target in a format similar to this: "100% of students will achieve 80% or better on rubric items related to the communication student learning outcome". Consider carefully before putting anything other than 100% of students at the start of this statement as it implies that you are comfortable with a certain percentage of students performing below the threshold you are expressing. For example, if you set a target that says "80% of students will score 70% or better on rubric items related to critical thinking" what you are saying is that you are comfortable with 20% of your students performing worse than 70%. Is that really your target for program graduates?

Questions to ask at this time include:

- Does each of our measures appropriately evaluate the particular knowledge, skill, and value we are trying to assess?
- Do the findings we are getting from the measure provide us with enough specificity to effectively evaluate student learning and, if necessary, allow us to create meaningful action plans for student learning improvement?

- Do we need to create or modify an existing rubric to acquire more meaningful assessment data? If so, you can find resources on building effective rubrics, including models for every major type of student learning outcome, on the Academic Assessment website:  
<https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/rubrics.html>
- Is the target for each of the measures meaningful? Do the targets appropriately reflect our goals for student learning in our program?
- If you have successfully surpassed your target for multiple years in a row you should consider raising your target – in which case you should ask what should our new target be?

Based on this discussion you should decide if you need to revise your measures or targets. Any changes to the assessment plan's measures and targets should be discussed and agreed upon during the meeting, as they need to be entered into Weave by the end of August.

#### Step 6: Holistically examining your program

You should discuss what your assessment plan findings and action plans say about the overall state of your academic program

Discuss the long term trend of the findings over the past years, what action plans the program has implemented and completed and what their effect was, and what these things say about the long term and short term status of the academic program in terms of achieving its intentions for the things it wants students to know, do, and value.

In addition to the questions above, questions to ask at this time include:

- What is the trend of the program's findings over the past years?
- (For academic programs with multiple campuses or delivery methods at which students can complete half or more of their degree requirements): How do the trends compare between the different campuses / delivery methods compare? Are we getting similar outcomes in each place / through each method of delivery?
- Are we sampling our students or gathering data from the whole population of students? If we are sampling how do we ensure our sample is valid and reliable?

- [Sampling refers not to whether or not you are gathering data from all your majors but rather if you are gathering data from the students who are completing the measure at the time you are gathering data on it. As most measures are linked to student work completed in conjunction with a required class, the basic idea here is: if you only have one section of the course and you gather data from all the students in that course you are not sampling, however if you have multiple sections of this course and you only gather data from some students/sections of the course you are sampling.]
- What are the short and long-term ramifications and implications of our findings and action plan activity for the program?
- What is our long-term progress towards achieving the student learning outcomes we have identified as important for our students to have?

#### Step 7: Updating your assessment plan

Based upon the discussion in Steps 1 – 5, you should collaboratively discuss if your current assessment plan is meeting your needs. Begin by reviewing the answer to the three questions in Step 1 – what you want your students to know, do, and value.

Questions to ask at this time include:

- What did we agree that we want our students to know, do, and value?
- Do our current assessment plan student learning outcomes align with what we have collaboratively decided we want our students to know, do, and value?
- Do our measures accurately and relevantly let us assess what we have collaboratively decided we want our students to know, do, and value?
- Are our “planned” and “in-progress” action plans working towards achieving the things we have collaboratively decided we want our students to know, do, and value?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no” or “only partly” then you should consider modifying your assessment plan so that it actually aligns with your intentions. An assessment plan that does not assess the things you deem important will not be useful to you.

You should collaboratively agree upon what your objectives, measures, and action plans should be for the upcoming assessment year that begins on September 1 and enter these changes into Weave by the end of August.

### Step 8: Making responsibilities clear

Once the faculty have agreed upon the parameters of the assessment plan (the student learning outcomes, measures, and action plans) for the upcoming assessment year (which begins Sept. 1), you should review the faculty's responsibilities for assessment for the coming year.

In consultation with your sustainability map (which tells you which student learning outcomes you have committed to assessing each year), you should discuss which outcomes you will be assessing and which measures you will be using to assess them. Remember that if your discussion indicates a need for it you can always assess more than what is in your sustainability map but what is in the sustainability map will always be the minimum amount you will assess in a given year.

Discuss what data needs to be gathered, where and when it will be gathered, who will be doing the gathering, who will be evaluating the data, and who will be reporting the data to the faculty and into WEAVE.

### Step 9: Updating your assessment files - **VERY IMPORTANT!**

Effective assessment depends on communication and continuity. In order to plan for the future you must understand what has happened in the past. By examining what you have tried in the past that did or did not work and long term trends of improvement or decline you get a broader perspective on what you have accomplished and how you accomplished it.

Hence, your past assessment activity is the key to building your current assessment planning and for understanding your program's legacy. Well documenting your past assessment activities allows future faculty members and program leaders to effectively utilize past assessment work for program design and improvement. Good documentation thereby ensures that past work is not 'forgotten' and instead continues to actively inform program design.

Good documentation is also important for communicating how effectively you are building your program to those outside your program.

As such, assessment plans, findings, action plans, and analysis are tools for documenting for yourselves and others the pathways you are constructing as you work towards building the most effective student learning focused programs possible.

This information is also critically important as it serves as documentation to support our external accreditation efforts. So the more clearly you document your assessment activities and demonstrate how you are using well-constructed assessment plans to close-the-loop in order to improve student learning, the more readily our accreditors will be able to see the good work you are doing.

### Step 10: Core Course Assessment

Some programs have courses in Tarleton's Core Curriculum. If your program has a course or courses in the Core Curriculum, you need to repeat each of the steps above for each core course.

Instead of asking about the program in each step, you will instead ask about the particular core course you are reviewing.

Note that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board sets the core curriculum student learning outcomes that core courses must follow. However, the program faculty determines how those outcomes are implemented into a particular core course. For example, if the state core curriculum standards requires a communication student learning outcome, a program may choose to implement this by designing an outcome that focuses on writing skills, presentation skills, or visual interpretation skills.

### Helpful resources:

Thank you for all you do to make Tarleton a premier institution of student learning!

Please remember that your General Education and Academic Assessment Committee members can be very helpful at every stage of this process. If you do not know who your General Education and Academic Assessment Committee members are you can find them here:

<http://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/committee/members.html>

The Academic Assessment website contains a lot of helpful information for both program and core course assessment, including an assessment FAQ, glossary, rubrics, and handbooks and guides – click on the “Assessment” tab on the right side of the Academic Assessment page to get a list of available resource: <https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/index.html>

Lastly, you can find valuable information about core course assessment on the General Education website: <https://www.tarleton.edu/generaleducation/index.html>