

The Elements of Effective Assessment Plans

Assessment is not an end, it is a means. The purpose of assessment is to provide us a powerful tool for improving student learning in our academic program.

Effective assessment relies on four very simple, straightforward questions:

- “What is it we want students to know, do, and value?”
- “What valid and reliable data can we measure to discern if students do in fact know, do, and value these things we as faculty see as central to our program?”
- “Where, when, and how can we gather this data?”
- “How can we use this data to guide improvements in our curriculum to help ensure that students know, do, and value the things we as faculty see as central to our program?”

The items in this guide below are effective assessment practices that can ensure that you can purposefully answer these four questions. This guide will help ensure that the assessment data you are collecting will provide you with the valid, reliable, and robust information you need to make effective, ongoing strategies for program improvement.

Assessment is not one-size-fits-all. Assessment should reflect the unique needs and priorities of your program and unit. As such, the General Education and Academic Assessment Committee’s role is to help your program or unit achieve *your* vision for your program or unit. Our goal is to not to create the details of your assessment plan but rather to help ensure that your assessment processes are well constructed, in accordance with SACSCOC, THECB, TAMUS and Tarleton requirements, so that the questions about your program *you* want to answer, the data you are gathering to answer these questions, and the systems you use to evaluate and implement action plans based on this data will function smoothly and effectively to achieve *your* goals.

Every year the General Education and Academic Assessment Committee will provide you feedback on developing effective assessment plans. The following document contains the key elements of effective assessment plans that are expected of academic programs at Tarleton State University. You can use this guide to self-evaluate your assessment plans. Please contact your college representatives on the General Education and Academic Assessment Committee if you have any questions about the information listed in this guide. Those members can be found at:

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

Findings

“Findings for measures must be reported for each related outcome. Make sure that each finding entered is consistent with the language and expectations of the measure to which it correlates. For academic programs offered on more than one campus or via alternate delivery modes, comparative results for multiple locations/delivery modes must be reported.”

Resources (Hold CTRL and Click the link to be taken to these document)

- [Tarleton State University's Guide to Developing a Quality Assessment Plan](#)

Key required elements

- Triangulated findings should be entered for every outcome designated for measurement on the sustainability map within one month after the end of the semester in which the findings are gathered.
- Outcomes not scheduled for assessment should have “Not reported this period” entered under findings
- For programs where students can take 50% or more of their coursework from multiple locations (i.e Stephenville, Waco, Southwest Metroplex, etc.) or through multiple delivery methods, findings should be reported separately for each locations or delivery method.
- Findings should correlate with the description of the assessment instrument in both the measure and target.

Mission Statements

Your mission statement should “concisely articulate a clear vision of the desired future. It serves as an anchor to keep a department or organization from drifting or losing its purpose and should correlate with the program’s official catalog description. As an anchor, it provides stability, yet it also allows for some flexibility. A degree of flexibility is important in the rapidly changing world in which we live and, for this reason, a mission statement does not discuss methods to accomplish the vision.”

The mission statement also must support learning aspects of Tarleton’s mission statement:

Tarleton State University provides an academically challenging education where learning is grounded in real-world experiences and effective teaching, research, scholarship, and service. As a member of The Texas A&M University System, Tarleton is rich in history and tradition while being committed to student success and diversity. Tarleton strives to develop moral and ethical thinkers, scholars, and leaders who demonstrate civility and integrity, while contributing meaningfully and responsibly to a global society.

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Key required elements

- The mission statement should clearly define the program or unit’s vision of its desired future.
- The mission statement should be concise.
- The mission statement should correlate with the program’s catalog description.
- The mission statement should clearly support the mission of the Department, College, and Tarleton.

Goals

“Long-term in nature [two years or more], program goals form the foundation for student-learning assessment. Directly linked to the program’s mission, goals stipulate the major principles the program serves (e.g., to develop student competence meeting employer demands in the field of practice).”

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Key required elements

- Goals should clearly support the program mission.
- Goals should be clearly stated.
- Goals should be long-term, two years or more, in nature.
- For programs where students can take 50% or more of their coursework from multiple locations (i.e Stephenville, Waco, Southwest Metroplex, etc.) or through multiple delivery methods, each goal must indicate that it applies to each of these multiple locations and delivery methods.

Outcomes

“Directly linked to the program’s goals, student learning outcomes encompass the specific knowledge, skills, and values that students are expected to achieve through their college experience.”

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Key required elements

- Outcomes should clearly support the program goal with which they are associated.
- Outcomes should be stated in student learning terms.
 - Outcomes should be phrased in terms of what knowledge, skill, and/or value students will demonstrate and not in terms of what faculty or the program will do as the purpose is to measure not what capacities we as faculty are *trying* to develop in students but what capacities students *actually* have developed.
 - Good, student focused: “Students will effectively analyze statistical data.”
 - Bad, faculty focused: “Faculty will teach students how to effectively analyze statistical data.”
- Outcomes should be written in terms of what students actually do rather than what they can theoretically do.
 - For example, instead of: “Students will be able to write persuasive position papers.”
Use the more active: “Students will write persuasive position papers.”
- Outcomes should be summative in nature.
 - Outcomes that are summative occur near the end of the student’s degree program experience and should assess the overall learning experiences of the student.

- Outcomes should have strategies that correspond to the course map to demonstrate how the Outcomes is being formatively (built over the length of the program) supported.
- Outcomes should be clearly measurable and have an obvious desired output.
- Outcomes should be triangulated by being measured by two or more Direct Measures.
- Outcomes should be linked to Supported Initiatives that are appropriate to both the type of assessment plan they are and the type of assessment data being gathered for the Outcome with which they are associated.
 - Core courses should be linked with Supported Initiatives beginning with 1.
 - Undergraduate program should be linked with Supported Initiatives beginning with 2.
 - Graduate program should be linked with Supported Initiatives beginning with 3.
- All UNDERGRADUATE academic programs should have one outcome focused on discipline appropriate technology skills.
- All GRADUATE academic programs should have one outcome focused on in-depth knowledge of the discipline literature and one outcome focused on ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences.

Measures

Measures are the specific methods used to gather data for proving whether or not student learning outcomes are being achieved. Each measure should be defined clearly and should state the time period and party responsible for data gathering.

At least two direct measurements are required for each student-learning outcome. Direct measures for student-learning assessment "... require students to display their knowledge, skills, and values for measurement. Objective tests, essays, presentations, portfolios, and classroom assignments all are examples of this criterion; tools such as student-perception reports or alumni surveys do not meet this criterion because they measure student perceptions about learning, rather than measuring actual student learning."

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Key required elements

- Measures should clearly indicate what the assessment instrument being used is and / or how it was selected / developed.
- Subjective Measures (e.g. papers, presentations, portfolios) should indicate they are being evaluated by multiple faculty members and / or a qualified external reviewer (e.g. external internship supervisor or project manager).
- Measures using rubrics should explain the method by which the rubric was selected / developed by program faculty members.
- Rubrics used in Measures should be on file in the Project Attachment section of Weave.

- Each Outcome needs to be assessed with at least two **direct** Measures.
 - Direct measures are products of student work that let you directly assess the skill in question.
 - Direct measures are examples of student work such as papers, presentations, portfolios that are assessed for particular assessment plan outcomes. E.g. a paper that is assessed by a rubric that assess writing in order to measure a writing outcome or a portfolio that is assessed by a rubric that assess content knowledge in order to measure a content knowledge outcome.
 - Course grades, paper grades, project grades, etc. are **NOT** direct measures because they typically represent the summation of the evaluation of many different knowledge and skill areas (e.g. a paper grade may be based on writing mechanics, content knowledge, penalties or rewards for turning work in on time, pre-paper work, etc.) and hence do not let us analyze their each student learning outcome in isolation.
 - It is fine to have indirect measures such as student-perception reports or alumni surveys if you feel these items are useful for your assessment purposes as long as you also have two direct measures for each outcome / objective.
- Measures clearly state the process by which the data from the measure will be gathered, including where and when the measure will occur.
- Measures clearly state the position(s) of persons responsible for gathering the data from the measure.
- Measures clearly state the position(s) of persons responsible for analyzing and reporting the data from the measure.
- For programs where students can take 50% or more of their coursework from multiple locations (i.e. Stephenville, Waco, Southwest Metroplex, etc.) or through multiple delivery methods, each Measure must indicate that it applies to each of these multiple locations and delivery methods and that each campus / delivery location will be assessed and their results reported individually.
- Measures need a specific, realistic target that is clearly related to each Outcome it is associated with.
 - E.g. for a measure measuring an Outcome about writing skills the target could be “100 percent of students will achieve 75 percent or better on the writing skills rubric”

- Measures that are using sampling rather than assessing all students need to describe the sampling methodology and steps taken to ensure reliability and validity.
 - Sampling does not mean you have to assess every student enrolled in your program every time you do assessment. Academic program assessment is summative and as such you will not be assessing all the students in your program but rather just the students near the end of their program careers. Hence, sampling only occurs when the summative assessment measurement instrument you are using (e.g. capstone papers, portfolios, etc) is not being gathered from all students in all the sections of the course in which this measure is occurring at the time you are doing the assessment.
- Measures that do not meet the target should have a linked action plan related to improving student learning for the measured outcome.

Action Plans

Action plans are the heart of your assessment plan. They are how you use assessment data to improve your academic program. Every academic program needs to have at least one in-progress action plan that is focused on improving student learning. The action plan should state explicitly how previous assessment findings were used to identify areas for student learning improvement and as a result what concrete steps are being taken to modify these areas. These steps could include such things as curricular revisions, development of new course content, reordering of course content to improve student learning, introduction of new student learning activities, etc.

Any measure with findings that did not meet its target needs to be linked with an in-progress action plan detailing what steps have been identified for improving student learning in the measured area and how these steps are being implemented.

At the end of every semester, each in-progress action plan needs to be updated with the details of what progress has been made towards implementing the action plan.

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Key required elements

- There should be at least one current in-progress action plan focusing on academic program improvement or enhancement that explicitly describes how assessment findings are being used to drive curricular improvements.
 - E.g. "The findings from the Spring 2020 assessment of writing skills showed that 43% of students could not construct adequate thesis statements. In Fall 2020 program faculty will develop a new module on thesis construction to be introduced into the research methodology course in Spring 2021."

- In-progress action plans should have semester by semester updates that explicitly detail what has been accomplished in regards to the action plan and what the next steps for the action plan will be (see UPDATE FALL 2020 in the example below).
 - E.g. “The findings from the Spring 2020 assessment of writing skills showed that 43% of students could not construct adequate thesis statements. In Fall 2020 program faculty will develop a new module on thesis construction to be introduced into the research methodology course in Spring 2021. UPDATE FALL 2020: The faculty met three times over the course of the fall semester to design a new module on thesis construction. Adopting a process used by the University of Purdue Writing Center, the faculty constructed a scaffolding series of assignments that allow students to construct, give and receive feedback, and revise three types of thesis statements. This module is completed and has been distributed to faculty for inclusion in the research methodology course in the spring.”
- Measures that do not meet the target should have a linked action plan related to improving student learning for the measured outcome.
- There should be no planned action plans that were created more than one year ago.
- Action plans should be clearly stated and / or easily understood by external readers.
 - Avoid jargon and acronyms, elaborate the details of the action plan and how it is related to assessment findings and assessment planning, and be clear on who will be working on the action plan and the timeline for implementation.
- In-progress action plans should not have completion dates that have already passed.
- Completed action plans should have a discussion of what was done, what the outcome was of the action plan, and why it was determined the action plan was completed.

Course Map

A course map visually represents how a program curriculum works collectively to support the development of the knowledge, skills, and values represented in their student learning outcome. It is how we ensure that every graduate of our academic program was introduced to, developed, and mastered the student learning outcomes we have included in our assessment plans. As such, course maps are a cross reference between our outcomes and our required program courses. Only required program courses are included in our course map, as we want to ensure that every graduate has had the opportunity to participate in these formative experiences.

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Key required elements

- The outcomes on the course map should match the outcomes listed in the program's assessment plan.
- Outcomes should be listed as "introduced" in at least one course on the course map.
- Outcomes should be listed as "developed" in at least one course on the course map.
- Outcomes should be listed as "mastered" in at least one course on the course map.
- Outcomes should not be listed as "mastered" in a non-mastery level course.
- The sequence of "introduced", "developed", "mastered" for outcomes should occur in the proper sequence on the course map.
- Every course on the course map is linked to at least one outcome.
 - Your required courses are where you ensure your student learning outcome are being achieved because they are the only program experiences that all graduates must share. As such, every required course should have elements that are working towards achieving your program's student learning outcomes. If you cannot link a required course to at least one of your outcomes you should consider why this is case as it may indicate a need to revise your curriculum and/or your outcomes.

Sustainability Map

A sustainability map visually represents a program's ten year plan for assessment. It demonstrates how a program plans to systematically and routinely gather and report data for all of its outcomes / objectives.

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Key required elements

- The outcomes on the sustainability map match the outcomes listed in the program's assessment plan.
- Each outcome is assessed on at least a biennial basis.
 - Note that this is a minimum - you can assess more frequently than this.
- There should be at least one outcome being assessed in every year.
- The sustainability map should have entries for every assessment year from 2020-21 to 2029-30.
 - If programs were implemented after the 2020-21 assessment year, the program's start date should be noted on the sustainability map.