Frequently Asked Questions

What is academic assessment?

Academic assessment is a structured process designed to effectively measure whether or not students are achieving the key student learning outcomes faculty and staff have for a program, course, or activity and to use the findings of this measurement to design effective interventions for improving student learning of these outcomes.

How long have Tarleton faculty been practicing academic assessment?

For generations Tarleton's faculty have worked collaboratively to improve their teaching processes in order to promote student learning. The development of the methodologies and practices of formal academic assessment provided an opportunity for Tarleton to build on this past work by implementing more formal, more systemic, more comprehensive, and more informative systems for assessing student learning. This formal academic assessment process has allowed Tarleton faculty to design more effective interventions for improving student learning. Tarleton has been engaged in this formal academic assessment process since 2005.

What is the difference between academic assessment and administrative unit assessment?

At Tarleton, both academic programs and administrative units engage in assessment. The structural components of their assessment plans are similar for both groups with both having defined goals, outcomes, and measures and both using assessment findings to make action plans for improvement. The key difference between the two lies in the nature of the outcomes they assess, the types of measurements they conduct, and the types of action plans they create. Information about administrative unit assessment can be found at Tarleton's Institutional Effectiveness website: https://www.tarleton.edu/ie/index.html

What programs or courses at Tarleton are involved in our formal academic assessment process?

Every academic degree program at Tarleton engages in formal academic assessment designed to improve student learning of a defined set of program-based student learning outcomes. This collaborative process involves all faculty members within the program.

Similarly, faculty members teaching courses in Tarleton's core curriculum engage in formal academic assessment designed to improve student learning of our core curriculum student learning outcomes.

[What is a student learning outcome?](#)

A student learning outcome is a key set of knowledge, value, or skill that students are expected to achieve as part of their participation in a program, course, or activity.

[Who decides what student learning outcomes will be assessed?](#)

Academic assessment is a faculty-led process.

As the area experts, each program's faculty define the key program student learning outcomes for their particular program.

Being part of a state-wide initiative, Tarleton's core curriculum assesses a set of state-wide student learning outcomes for each component area of its core curriculum.   Faculty in each program area define how these state-wide student learning outcomes will be implemented in core courses within their particular program areas.

[How do you best measure whether or not students have achieved a student learning outcome?](#)

Student learning outcomes are best assessed using multiple direct measures of student learning. A direct measure is an actual product of student work such as a paper, presentation, portfolio, set of examination questions, or internship evaluation that is evaluated for the *specific* characteristics that apply to a student learning outcome. Using multiple measures allows faculty to corroborate their assessment findings while providing richer, more robust data they can use to make effective action plans for improving student learning.

[Can you use assignment or course grades to measure whether or not students have achieved a student learning outcome?](#)

Overall assignment or course grades are typically not good direct measures of student learning outcomes because they are usually a compilation of many different components of student learning. For example, an overall grade on a paper may be a cumulative reflection of a student's writing skills, a student's theoretical knowledge, a student's promptness or tardiness in completing the assignment, whether or not the student has completed preliminary drafts of the paper, etc. Overall assignment or course grades that encompasses a broad set of areas such as this are *holistic* measures and can very useful for *holistic* evaluation.

However, student learning outcomes are about *specific* knowledge, skills, and values and are best assessed using *specific* measures – e.g. measures that only gather and report data related to the *specific* learning outcome. For example, if we wish to assess a student learning outcome about writing proficiency we would only want to examine data about writing proficiency and not, as in the example

above, data about areas not directly related to writing proficiency such as promptness and tardiness, whether or not they completed multiple drafts, etc.

However, it is important to know that well designed assignment evaluation can provide the specific direct assessment data that will allow us to evaluate our student learning outcomes while still providing an overall holistic grade for the assignment.

For objective examinations (e.g. multiple choice, true-false questions, etc.) this is done by creating subsets of questions that are aligned with specific student learning outcome competencies and then calculating a subarea score on just these questions.

For subjective assignments (e.g. papers, presentations, internship evaluations, etc.) this is done through the use of a rubric with sub-areas related to specific student learning outcome competencies.

Sample rubrics, guides for building rubrics, and rubric creation tools can be found on Tarleton's academic assessment website:
https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/rubrics.html .

How can academic assessment help faculty and staff implement plans for improving student learning?

Well-designed academic assessment processes provide faculty and staff with valid and reliable data that allows them to analyze patterns in student achievement in order to identify opportunities to design and implement effective action plans for improving student learning.

As well-designed academic assessment processes provide specific and direct measures of student achievement, faculty are able to identify patterns and issues that are masked by more holistic or anecdotal approaches for analyzing patterns of student achievement. The more focused and relevant data provided by well-designed academic assessment processes also allows for more targeted interventions for improving student learning than other more informal evaluation methods.

What resources and support are available to faculty to help them build and implement effective academic assessment plans?

Tarleton has a standing committee, the General Education and Academic Assessment Committee, charged with helping faculty design and implement effective academic assessment processes. Each college at Tarleton has three members on this committee: an associate dean, a department head, and a faculty member representative. A list of committee members can be found at Tarleton's academic assessment website: https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/committee/members.html .

Tarleton's academic assessment website also contains a wide array of resources to support faculty working on academic assessment including:

A glossary of assessment terms
https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/glossary.html

Handbooks on how to create assessment plans and run assessment meetings
https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/Resources.html

Assessment calendars
https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/timeline.html

Rubrics and rubric creation guidebooks and tools
https://www.tarleton.edu/academicassessment/assessment/rubrics.html

You can also find many useful resources on Tarleton's core curriculum website including:

Tarleton's core curriculum student learning outcomes
https://www.tarleton.edu/generaleducation/generaleducation/core.html

Tarleton's core curriculum component areas, courses, and assessment documents (click on a course name for assessment documents)
https://www.tarleton.edu/generaleducation/generaleducation/core.html

The biennial academic assessment rotation for core curriculum courses
https://www.tarleton.edu/generaleducation/evaluation/rotation.html