Components of an Academic Assessment Plan
Institutional Effectiveness
USF System Office of Decision Support
(academic year)

Each degree program has a plan in the **System for Assessment Management (SAM)**, which is an internally developed database available online. Access to SAM is granted through Institutional Effectiveness in the System Office of Decision Support, and uses each person’s Net ID to log in.

SAM is set up so each plan is customizable.

Academic programs are asked to input their mission statement and program goals, which may be edited at any time, but carry forward year to year.

Under each program goal, there can be one or more student learning outcomes (SLOs). These carry forward from year-to-year; however, programs are expected to update and adjust these on an annual basis. Undergraduate programs MUST have three areas: content specific knowledge, communication, and critical thinking.

Each student learning outcome has five sections: student learning outcome statement, method of assessment, performance targets, assessment results, and use of assessment results. Institutional Effectiveness reviews these five sections the most critically.

Contributors from academic programs are required to input data and update in each section of each student learning outcome on an annual basis.
Completion Calendars:

Assessments are due on a rotational schedule in two phases: planning and reporting.

**Planning phase:** This phase opens mid fall semester and closes at the end of the spring semester (approximately May 15). During the planning phase, each program should enter or revise their projected plan, which includes the following: student learning outcome statement, method of assessment, and performance targets. These are reviewed by Institutional Effectiveness and comments are provided. The program can change the plan(s) at any time during the process.

**Reporting phase:** This phase opens at the beginning of the Summer Semester and closes at the beginning of the Fall Semester (approximately October 1). Programs should revise their plans (if necessary) and enter their results into assessment results and use of assessment results. The final reports are reviewed by Institutional Effectiveness.

Each year’s final assessments are used to complete required reports to the deans, the provost’s office, and the Board of Governors (BOG). They are also compiled for five-year accreditation requirements submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

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### Academic Assessment Reporting

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The following document contains a breakdown of each section and subsection within SAM, as well as what information should be included.

**Mission Statement:**
This section should contain the department of the degree program’s mission statements. Mission statements can be usually be found on the degree program’s website. Double check that what is written in SAM matches the department or degree’s mission. If correct, this can remain unedited.

**Program Goals:**
Program goals should comprise the knowledge, skills, and competencies each program expects its graduates to command upon graduation. Program goals are broad, overarching statements that are central to each program’s curriculum. They are not intended to be and should not be measureable outcomes. **USF’s accreditation bodies require that undergraduate programs have at least the following three program goals:**

1. Mastery of content/discipline-specific knowledge and skills
2. Demonstration of critical thinking skills
3. Demonstration of communication skills.

Degree programs are free to add more program goals, and graduate degree programs are asked to design their program goals (there is no minimum program goal requirement for graduate degrees, or for certificates at any level).

Under each program goal there should be at least one student learning outcome.

**Student Learning Outcome and formatting the Student Learning Outcome Statement in SAM:**
The statement of the student learning outcome is the first subsection of the five-part student learning outcome section, and is a specific statement about what students will be able to demonstrate after a certain level of instruction. Student learning outcomes are organized under a program goal and are measureable outcomes of that goal. In turn, each student learning outcome has a specified method of assessment.

**For example:** under the ‘communication’ program goal, a program may have the following student learning outcome statement: “Students will be able to orally present and defend their original research projects”.

Method of Assessment:

This is the most important section of the SAM report. It describes how students were assessed on the learning outcome. There are several methods that can be used. Each method has a criteria of what should be included in the section. Each learning goal must have a clearly stated method of assessment specific to the learning outcome.

The method of assessment should be as specific as possible. Aspects of the method that should be included are as follows:

1. **A description of the critical assignment assessment type** (essays, comprehensive exam, internship evaluation, embedded test questions, presentations, discussion board entry, etc.)

2. **A statement on how the assessment specifically measures the task, information, or competency stated in the student learning outcome.**

3. **A statement which delineates the course(s) in which the assessments were administered.** If administered outside of a course, under what circumstances the assessment was administered.

4. **Which students in the program will be assessed** (first year students, graduating seniors, all students in the program, etc.) Remember that assessment methods cannot be reliant on external determinates such as the acceptance to a journal of conference, and must be designed so that all students within the program are represented in the assessment.

5. **If a sample of student work will be analyzed in lieu of all students, include information on the sample** (percentage of the total number of students, the process of collecting it, etc.)

6. **If employing a rubric, provide specific information on how it was developed and validated.** We encourage the use of previously established, valid rubrics. However, many programs design their own rubric to specifically match the criteria of the assessment. If using a previously validated rubric, include where it originated. If developing a rubric internally, include a statement on how its validity and reliability was addressed.

7. **Information on who will be reviewing and rating the assessment.** Provide information on the number of raters and how they are related to the program.
Raters should be professionals (preferably faculty), with some experience or training in how to use the rubric. Peers (students) are not appropriate individuals to be included as raters. It is important to note that most forms of assessment require multiple raters.

8. **How inter-rater reliability will be addressed.** Almost all assessment types require multiple raters and therefore inter-rater reliability (IRR) should be considered. Assessments that use open-ended response, written, oral presentation, portfolio review or performance-based need multiple faculty raters to review each student’s submission. From these independent faculty scores, a final score must be produced. A statement of how differences in scores between raters was addressed (e.g., a third rater was utilized, scores were averaged). The method of assessment section should include a statement on IRR.

Note: the following assessment types **do not** need inter-rater reliability.
- Standardized tests
- Embedded test questions that are multiple choice, or are structured so that only one, true answer exists.

**For example:** If the program is using a sample of essays from qualifying courses to assess critical thinking skills, then the method of assessment section should include:

1. A statement on the type of assessment: essay format, from what class, etc.
2. Information on how the student papers will be evaluated to assess critical thinking skills and information on the prompt of the papers.
3. How the sample of student work was obtained (from what classes, was it by random selection, stratified random selection, etc.),
4. Percentage of the program’s students to be included in the sample.
5. How many faculty members will rate each student paper (usually must be two or more).
6. How faculty scores will be tabulated to produce a final score for each student (how IRR will be addressed).
7. Information on how the rubric was developed and validated.

**Performance Target:**

Performance targets are internal predictions made by the program regarding the level of student achievement for that student learning outcome. This section can be short and must only include a numerical prediction. The prediction should be stated in terms of a
rubric’s parameters. For example if the rubric rates students on a scale of 1-5 for that student learning outcome, the performance target should include a percentage of students and a predicted achievement rate:

For example: “Program implementation will be considered a success if 90% of the sample will achieve a final score of 4 or higher for this assessment.”

Assessment Results:

The assessment results section should mirror the wording in the performance target section, but include the results of the assessment. The total number of students assessed on each student learning outcome should be indicated in this section. If using a sample, the final number included in the sample should be indicated, as well as the adjusted percentage of the total number of students in the program. For assessment methods that require multiple raters, the final scores are sufficient for this section instead of including the independent scores, statistical analysis and final numbers for each student.

Assessment results can be reported in terms of percentage of students achieving in each category of the rubric. For example if a program used a rubric that assessed students on a scale of 1-5, they might report the results as:

For example:

Students achieving a final score of 5/5 was approximately 75% (n = 30).
Students achieving a final score between 4-4.9/5 was 20% (n = 8).
Students achieving a final score of 3-3.9/5 was 5% (n = 2).
No students achieved a final score lower than a 3.

Use of Results:

The use of assessment results section is very important, and the portion of the assessment plan that is most commonly completed incorrectly. This portion is to be the area that describes the intended improvements at the program level. It is an important distinction to note: this is an assessment of the program, not its participants.

Programs should look at and think about what improvements or developments will be implemented at the program level in light of the assessment results. This section is not
for programs to describe how they will change their assessment plan to yield greater levels of student achievement, or to elaborate on the assessment results in any way. In addition, this section is not meant for programs to relay how they will work with students differently to achieve greater results (e.g., advising students to seek tutoring).

Assessment is not linear and finite; it is continuous and seeks to assess program development on an annual basis. If all performance targets have been met within a plan, the program is asked to develop learning outcomes that improve new areas aside from what has already been “perfected.”

**Example 1:** If the critical thinking assessment resulted in a significantly lower number of students achieving at the performance target, than the use of results section could include how and where the program will reinforce critical thinking skills, what adjustments will be made to the curriculum, how program faculty will address the deficiency, and other future improvements or developments.

**Example 2:** If the critical thinking assessment resulted in sufficient scores to indicate that the measured learning outcome has been met, then the program should include a statement that the program is functioning well in this area, as well as, a statement of the projected area of concentration for the subsequent year’s assessment.