UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

A PREEMINENT RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

# Student Support Services Assessment Handbook

*Revised November 4, 2021, Version 1.5*

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# Introduction

## Our Mission

The mission of the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) team in USF's Office of Decision Support is to ensure compliance with regulations and policies and institutional accreditation. Additionally, we promulgate good assessment and evaluation practices across the university and align these assessment activities with other quality monitoring and continuous improvement activities, including strategic planning, college reviews, program reviews, administrative office reviews, budgeting, and the development of accountability plans. The office maintains a focus on the continuous improvement of learning and student development by guiding faculty and staff in the use of methodologically rigorous inquiry designed to allow practitioners to identify and implement enhancements to increase the achievement of desired outcomes.

## Assessment

Assessment at USF is an ongoing, continuous quality improvement exercise. The process of assessment is designed to facilitate improvements while meeting the requirements of our institutional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The IE team oversees and facilitates the process of assessment, including the integration of assessment into annual administrative office reviews, annual reporting, and budgeting processes.

## System for Assessment Management (SAM)

SAM is an online assessment management system used to enter, edit, and manage all assessment plans and reports. Please note that the system is optimized for use with Google Chrome only.

## Using this Handbook

This handbook will explain and illustrate the process of assessment at USF, including how to access, navigate, and input information into SAM. The handbook also includes an appendix of resources to assist in enhancing the compliance of programmatic assessment activities with external requirements.

## Contact Us

Please visit https://bit.ly/assessUSF, send any questions or comments to assessment@usf.edu, or call Dr. Rebecca Gibbons at 941-359-4505.

# Part 1: POLICY & PROCESS

## Student Support Services Assessment Overview

## What is Student Support Services Assessment?

1. In short, assessment in Student Support Services is a process, including systematically collecting evidence to determine the extent to which goals have been achieved, reporting the results, and subsequently increasing the level of achievement through various action items.[1]
2. At USF, Student Support Services are assessed at the Associate Vice President and College Student Support Services Office level. At this level, assessment involves making expectations for both student learning and operational excellence explicit and public, setting appropriate criteria and standards for quality, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards, and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance.[2,3]

## Why Assess?

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve the institution as a whole through improving student learning and student success. **USF's primary goal** is "to promote the lifelong success of well-educated, highly-skilled, and adaptable alumnae/alumni who lead enriched lives, are engaged citizens and thrive in a dynamic global market." The process of assessment allows Student Support Services to identify their overarching goals for success. Then, the process asks these offices to identify specific objectives for what students should experience or demonstrate during their time at USF and determine the degree to which the objectives are met; furthermore, the process of assessment requires that offices use the information to improve future student learning and experiences.

## Policy: Regulations and Requirements

Assessment of Student Support Services is mandated by our institutional accrediting body, the **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)**. USF policy also reflects the mandate for conducting assessment in these areas:

**SACSCOC Standard 8.2.** The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in (c) academic and student services that support student success.

**USF Policy 10-060 Excerpt.** Student learning outcomes at the University of South Florida are designed for the evaluation of programs. Every academic and student support program at USF must have an active assessment plan on file in the institutional assessment management system.

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[1] AALHE, Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (2020) Foundation Statement #1: What is Assessment in Higher Education?

[2] Angelo, T. (1995). Reassessing (and defining) assessment. *The AAHE Bulletin*, *48*(2), 7-9.

[3] Palomba, C., & Banta, T. (1999). *Assessment essentials: planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

## Process of Assessment Planning & Reporting

To facilitate compliance with all stakeholders, IE has devised an annual cycle for planning and reporting that allows for offices to focus on continuous quality improvement in the achievement of their goals and objectives. The process is depicted in Figure 1.

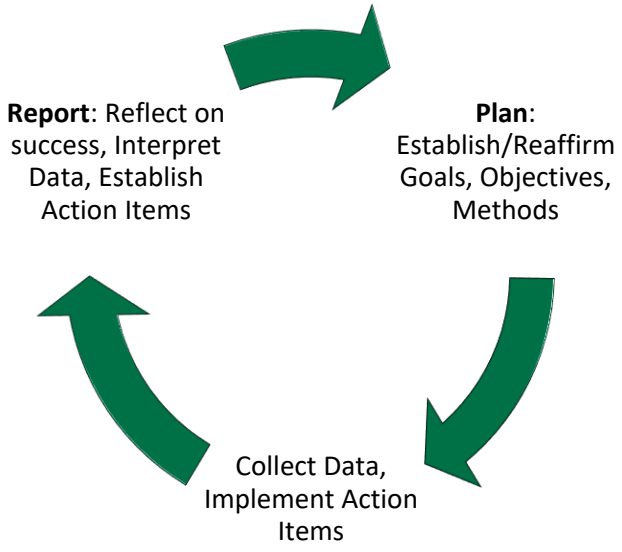



Figure 1. Overall USF Process of Assessment for Student Support Services.

Assessment is an ongoing process, so an annual cycle of planning, data collection/analysis, and action items is used at USF that allows for distributing these tasks accordingly. Every year, a **Plan** for data collection is submitted at the beginning of the academic year along with a **Report** on the last year's data by each Associate Vice President, or their designee, representing the goals for the entire AVP area representing all students being served, especially representing that equitable services are being offered on each USF campus. The timeline for this work is depicted in Figure 2.

These **Plans** and **Reports** are used to submit required documentation to the Vice President and the Provost's office and also gathered for five-year and ten-year accreditation requirements submitted to SACSCOC. While individual offices submit the **Plans** and **Reports**, the IE Team manages the submission of assessment materials to these external organizations.

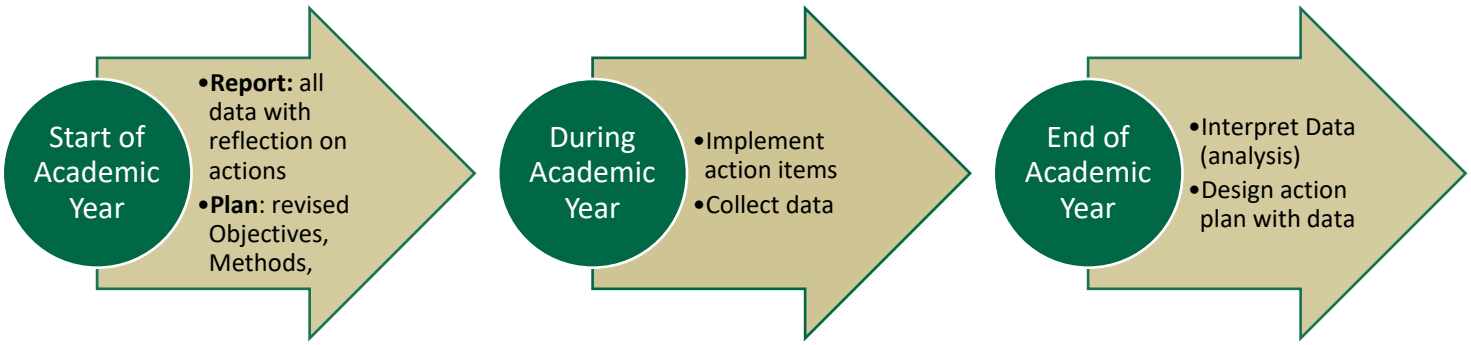



Figure 2. Timeline of the assessment process

## Plan & Report Components and Template

The **Plans** and **Reports** are submitted online through the System for Assessment Management (SAM). SAM has a structure of various required components, which are briefly described here, demonstrated in Figure 3, and described in more detail in the Assessment Template.

The **Plan** has three major components: (a) the Objectives to be assessed, (b) the specific Method of Assessment for each Objective, and (c) the Performance Target for each Objective. These will be submitted and reviewed by IE, during which comments will be provided.

The **Report** is the venue for program staff to enter their results into (d) the Assessment Results section and complete (e) the Use of Assessment Results section. Section (e) must detail reflection on the implementation of the assessment plan as well as the specific action steps that will be taken based on the data to improve the student experience, learning, or another component of the office's work.

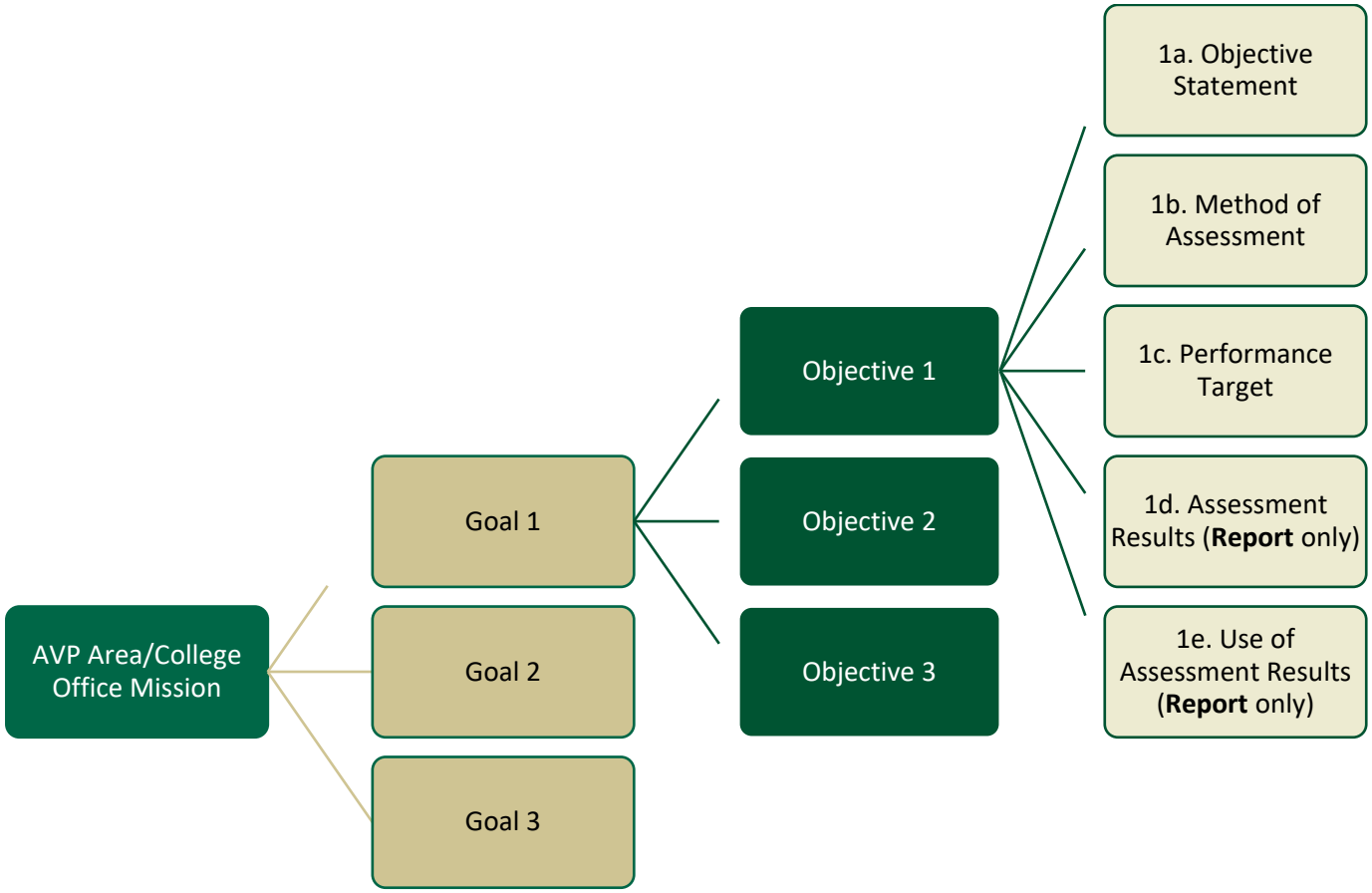



Figure 3. Assessment Plan and Report component structure. The number of goals and objectives is flexible for each AVP area/College, with a minimum of one of each. Components 1d and 1e are only included in **Reports**, not **Plans.**

## *USF Academic and Student Support Services Assessment Template*

**Name of the AVP Area/College Office**

**Mission Statement:** ***[Mission copied as published elsewhere, and aligned with the University and/or College mission]***

**Area Goal 1** ***[What is the office trying to achieve?]:***

**1a. Objective Statement.** *[Clearly state what* ***students will experience, know, and/or be able to*** *do after interacting with the office, or a specific outcome that will be observed if the goal is met. Ensure objective is aligned to the program mission and goal. Objectives can be in the form of student learning outcomes, reflecting what students will learn during their experience, or in the form of operational performance outcomes, reflecting the services that students will interact with.]*

**1b. Method of Assessment** *[Describe the combination of ways information is gathered about how well the unit is achieving the objective. Describe the data collection process and context: when, where, how, and who will be counted or evaluated and by whom; expected variation in the data across courses and sections; and student motivation. If sampling students (i.e., for a survey), describe the method and explain its appropriateness. Include details about stakeholder (faculty, students, staff, employers, alumni, etc.) involvement.]*

**1c. Performance Target** *[State a specific target that will signify success in delivering the office's objective. Ensure it aligns with the student learning outcome and methods of assessment. Provide a logical rationale for why the target is appropriate.]*

**1d. Assessment Results** Report only. *[Diagnose office strengths and weaknesses across the criteria used to assess each Objective. Document if/how the actual assessment process differed from what was planned. Describe stakeholder involvement in analyzing and reflecting on results.]*

**1e. Use of Assessment Results** Report only. *[Reflect on what the results mean as far as goal achievement for the program. Based on the results, develop a plan for actionable "Next Steps", including details for how to track changes made and the results of those changes.]*

## Process Summary: What to do to complete Plans & Reports

Beginning of Year **Plan**

- Reflect on the past processes and results, and discuss past improvements to establish, update, or reaffirm:
    1. The mission statement and aligned goals, as established in the unit's Annual Report.
    2. Specific, observable objectives that are associated with the goals.
    3. Methods that will be used to assess the objectives. Details on methods for assessment can be found in the Assessment Standards.
    4. Targets for performance on each of the objectives.

Activities During the Year

- Collect data in alignment with established methods.
- Implement action items identified in past assessment cycles.

End of Year **Report**

- Analyze the data and summarize the assessment findings.
- Reflect on data and processes, focusing on the contribution of the office to the results and how results can be improved in the future.
- Generate an action plan for using the assessment results to improve programming and/or services**.**

# PART 2: COMPLIANCE & QUALITY

## Student Support Services Assessment Checklist

IE has generated Assessment Standards to provide Student Support Services offices with insight into the minimum requirements for compliance. These standards are summarized in the Checklist. Use the Checklist to actively monitor assessment activities within the department to help ensure compliance.

| **Student Support Services Assessment Plan & Report Review Checklist** | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. MISSION STATEMENT** | | | |
| The statement is matched with the mission of the office published in all other venues. | | | |
| **2. THE GOALS:** | | | |
| Are sufficiently high-level. | | | |
| Are aligned with Mission Statement. | | | |
| **3. ALL OBJECTIVE STATEMENTS MUST:** | | | |
| a. Be either student learning objectives or performance objectives. | | | |
| b. Be written as a full sentence. | | | |
| c. Align with the mission and goal. | | | |
| d. Detail a specific outcome. | | | |
| e. Be observable and measurable. | | | |
| e. Be useful for improvement. | | | |
| **4. THE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT MUST:** | | | |
| a. Include sufficient detail. | | | |
| b. Align with the objective. | | | |
| c. Address accuracy and precision. | | | |
| d. Identifies who is engaged in the process. | | | |
| e. Discuss how all students (from all campuses) are involved. | | | |
| f. Be useful for improvement. | | | |
| **5. THE PERFORMANCE TARGETS MUST:** | | | |
| a. Align to the objective and method of assessment. | | | |
| b. Be realistic. | | | |
| c. Be useful for improvement. | | | |
| **6. THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS MUST INCLUDE (Report only):** | | | |
| a. The total number of students/faculty/reports involved. | | | |
| b. All relevant statistics (quantitative data) or themes (qualitative data). | | | |
| c. Alignment with the performance target. | | | |
| **7. THE USE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS MUST (Report only):** | | | |
| a. Demonstrate appropriate reflection. | | | |
| b. Include action items. | | | |
| c. Demonstrate collaboration | | | |
| d. Not “continue to monitor…”<br>(If results are positive, reflection on effective practice is included.) | | | |

# Student Support Services Assessment Standards

## Mission Statement

The mission statement should be identical to the mission statements published elsewhere, such as on the website or any posted materials. An adjustment in the mission requires adjustment of most components of a office's work. The mission should serve as the foundation upon which all goals, objectives, methods of assessment, and performance targets are based.

## Goals

The goals of the AVP area/College Office are the high-level descriptions of the results regarding student success or learning that the office seeks to achieve. The goals do not need to be specific or measurable but should be holistic enough to guide the development of programming and services within the office. Only one goal is required and its subject is at the discretion of the leadership, however, any number of goals can be included to cover any number of subject areas. The goals should serve as an organizing structure upon which the objectives should be built (See Figure 3 for structural reference).

## Objective Statement(s) (a)

The objective statements are the specific, measurable outcomes for the office. Each objective must emerge naturally from and be aligned with the overall mission of the office and with one of the goals listed. Objectives should include information about what students will do or experience when interacting with the office and/or information about what the office will produce in service to its overall goals. The types of objectives that can be used for this section are described in Figure 4.

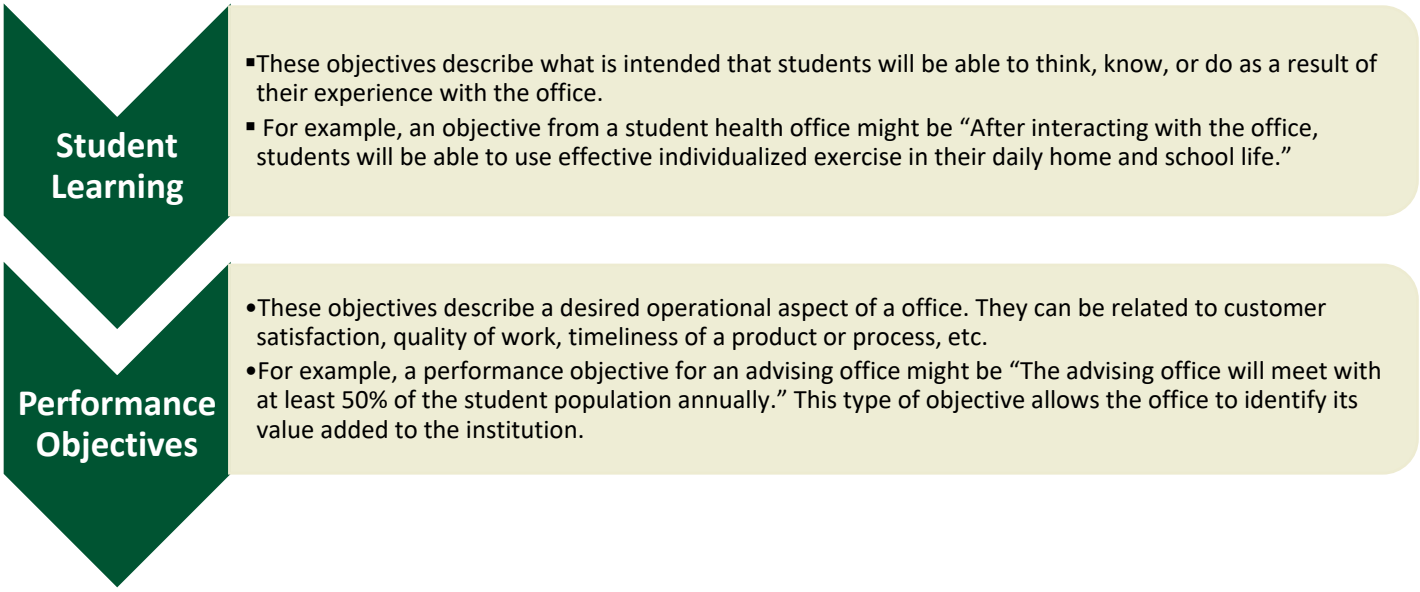



Figure 4. Types of objectives allowed.

While not required, ***it is especially encouraged that each office has at least one student learning objective***. In some cases, these can be co-curricular student learning objectives that have significant overlap with existing academic program learning outcomes; for example, the Enhanced General Education program

includes outcomes like Human and Cultural Diversity that are likely addressed in various non-academic offices. If a student learning objective is chosen, the Assessment Standards for academic programs should be used to determine if the assessment is compliant.

Performance Objectives are encouraged to help the office identify potential pain points and use the data for targeted improvements. For example, a Security office performance operational outcome might be to "reduce the incidence of students being criminally victimized on campus by 10% in two years." Specific actions can be identified and adjusted to meet this objective.

Sometimes, in the interest of writing performance objectives, offices will generate task objectives. These objectives describe the activities, tasks, or processes or a office that support the operational aspects. For example, an Online Learning office task objective might be "The online learning office will implement a new anti-cheating technology in Canvas." Because these objectives describe actions instead of results, they are ***not recommended***. These objectives can be enhanced with the addition of an operational result, such as "The Online Learning office will reduce the proportion of FF grades in online classes." An additional example: An Advising office task objective might say "The advising office will create and implement a new orientation and welcome week programming for transfer students." This can be enhanced to a performance objective such as "Transfer students attending a new orientation and welcome week programming will identify the programming as a useful contribution to their success."

All performance objective statements must:

a. **Be written as a full sentence.** The objective must clearly indicate what the office is seeking to accomplish. As such, there must be a subject of interest (often students, but possibly a report or a financial benchmark, etc.) as well as an action. What will the students think or feel? What will a report or program include? The objective must be a full sentence that includes each of these components.
    - **Example**: An objective that **does not** meet this standard is "resolve unpaid balances" as an objective for a Financial Aid office. While this is a general area of importance, it can be enhanced; "the office will resolve unpaid balances for FTIC students within one month of notification through active outreach" is acceptable.

b. **Align with the mission and goal.** It should be clear to an outside reader that the objective will produce evidence in support of the mission of the office and the goal to which it is matched.
    - **Example**: Some offices have a focus on faculty engagement. These offices should have a faculty target population for goals and objectives, because they are aligned with the mission, and should not include student outcomes in their objectives.

c. **Detail a specific outcome.** Objective statements must be more specific than the goal statements, and be detailed enough such that someone unfamiliar with the office and its activities (such as a site visitor from an institutional accreditor) can identify what the office expects to accomplish. This means that each objective is discernible from another and the goal statements. When objective statements are specific, they can be applied to the results that occur as a result of the actions of the office's work.
    - **Example:** A specific objective for a Career Services office might be "Each quarter, Career Services will place ten more students who live on campus in paid internships," and another would be "The office will increase the number of businesses within 3 miles of campus that participate in our internship program annually." Both objectives must be met for an overall

goal of growing the internship program to be successful and both objectives must be measured separately since they require different tasks to complete.

**d. Be observable and measurable.** Each office must be able to determine if its objectives have been met. As such, each objective must be observable and measurable.

- **Example:** An objective that **does not** meet this standard is "Students will integrate into the culture of USF." While this is a valuable desire and would be an appropriate goal, measuring the achievement of this objective would be too resource-intensive to be manageable. The nebulous construct of culture is theoretically measurable, but, because the objective seeks to know something about a student's overall behavior, it would require substantial effort to observe. A more reasonably measurable version of the same objective might be "Students will feel a sense of belonging on the USF campus." The standard to have measurable objectives does not exclude objectives that focus on satisfaction or other student experience or attitude variables; measures such as surveys are applicable and recommended in this case. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) administered by the Office of Decision Support has a scale for "Sense of Belonging" and those items can be used as a measure of this attitude.
- **Example:** A measurable objective might be "The information technology help desk will minimize downtime for help availability." In this case, downtime can be quantified in minutes and hours, etc.

**e. Be useful for improvement.** For an objective to be attributed to the office, the office must be able to make adjustments to achieve the objective. In the student support services, many student behaviors are outside of our control. Because the purpose of assessment is to promote continuous improvement, each objective must be related to a potential action that can help the office improve.

- **Example:** An objective that **does not** meet this standard is "The office will work to increase the two-year graduation rate of AA transfers by 25% in three years," since this is outside the locus of control of any individual office. This might serve a office as a high-level goal, with individual, actionable objectives listed under that goal, such as: "Students attending the Transfer orientation will have a higher rate of graduation in two years than non-attending Transfer students."

## Method of Assessment (b)

The Method of Assessment for each objective is a description of how the objective will be measured and how evidence will be gathered. Examples are surveys, dashboards, and collecting data from databases. There should be at least one Method of Assessment in each objective, but more can be included as appropriate. When choosing and designing the Method of Assessment, the most important thing to keep in mind is that it should produce results that can be used for improvement.

The Method of Assessment must:

**a. Include sufficient detail.** The Method of Assessment can take many shapes and forms, and the description must include the information needed so that an outside observer could determine what technique was chosen.

- **Example**: Some objectives can be assessed using the rates at which students use programs, services, and facilities. The Method of Assessment should be defined based on how data will be collected and the parameters of the measure (i.e., card swipe, count at certain times, BullsConnect check-ins).
- **Example**: If the objective is related to the cost-effectiveness of a unit or service, all variables should be defined, such as operating budget, spend-down, etc.
- **Example**: If the method of assessment includes qualitative data collection methodologies, such as focus groups, the questions that will guide the conversation should be included if at all possible.

**b. Align with the objective.** The method of assessment for each objective should be clearly (i.e., evident to an outside observer) related to the objective.

- **Example**: An objective that focuses on student retention **should not** be measured with a survey.
- **Example**: An objective that explores the percent of a population served should include counts of visits per year.
- **Example**: Financial effectiveness calculations should include methods including spending.

**c. Address accuracy and precision.** The method must be designed to provide data that can be relied upon to make decisions; to do this, information should be both accurate and precise. While no method of assessment will provide perfect information, recognizing any potential pain points and discussing how they will be addressed in the method of assessment section can assuage problems after data is collected and is being used for decision-making.

- **Example**: A user satisfaction survey should be vetted by multiple student success experts to determine if the questions apply to the element of satisfaction that the team is seeking to measure. A vetted satisfaction survey is the annual NSSE survey administered by the Office of Decision Support. The scales of this survey can provide accurate and precise information if analyzed for a specific outcome, such as feeling supported on campus. These data are also available on the Office of Decision Support website and can be filtered for college and program (by CIP code) so are readily available.
- **Example**: Methods for tracking data such as the number of students served should be vetted to ensure the quality of the information collected. A single-time count of participants in an event might miss valuable information such as overall participation, but it may provide a specific insight that is valuable to the office regarding an aspect of an event.

**d. Identify who is engaged in the process.** Especially when assessment methods like benchmarking with peer institutions or complying with professional standards are being used, it is important to identify who is involved in carrying out the method. While in many cases, counts will be done by staff and questionnaires will be completed by students, there must be multiple evaluators for subjective assessments like benchmarking and adhering to disciplinary standards. It is also important to note that the purpose of

assessment is continuous improvement, so engagement with multiple office stakeholders is a best practice that will enable actions to be derived from data collections. Allocating all assessment work to one individual in the office is not an acceptable practice.

e. **Discuss how all students (from all campuses) are involved.** The university must address the needs of students from residential, commuter, distance learning, Sarasota-Manatee campus, Tampa campus, and St. Petersburg campus populations. If there are different objectives in a particular office for each of these student populations, each needs to be listed and an appropriate method of assessment must be selected based on the unique context of the student population. If the objective is to be the same across populations, the method should be inclusive of all students.

- **Example:** The data collected should **not** be exclusively face-to-face if the office serves distance learning students.

f. **Be useful for improvement.** Just like the objective, the method of assessment should be actionable. This requires a delicate balance between the collection of data and the use of that data for decision-making.

- **Example**: While it might be easy to find information about the number of students who attended an event, this information might not help improve the event. If the number of attendees was lower than expected, what could help increase the attendance? A needs assessment survey or even qualitative data collection addressing the needs of students would provide more actionable information than a count of attendees.
- **Example**: Many offices have access to data about the retention rates of various student populations. Even if it is available, this information might not help improve the services provided by the office. If the retention rate is lower than the goal, how much control does the office have on increasing it? A method of assessment that might provide more useful information could include rubrics completed by advisors about student knowledge.

## Performance Target(s) (c)

These are the numerical thresholds that would signify the achievement of the stated objectives and are typically brief statements detailing the value desired. For objectives with qualitative topics, these targets can be described based on the ideal result, such as an increase in an attitude. For quantitative methods, such as an objective seeking a decrease in flagged reports, etc., it is recommended to include a minimum acceptable value and a reach goal for determining peak performance.

The Performance Target must:

a. **Align to the Objective and Method of Assessment.** The performance target should naturally follow the objective and method of assessment. Most of the time, there is an objective related to a rate of student success in some dimension. The target must be listed in the same unit of rate (students per semester, for example) as is described in the method and the objective. In some cases, the objective includes language detailing the target, which is an acceptable practice.

- **Example**: An objective might be “The Veterans’ Services office will increase participation in events by 25% this year.” In this case, the target should be restated in the performance

target section. In addition, the office can add a reach goal for a 40% increase in participation in the Performance Target.

b. **Be realistic.** It is tempting to hold high goals for our work to achieve our missions. It is also tempting to set targets at levels that we know we can achieve without additional effort. An ideal performance target is informed by experience and is set at a value that would identify to the office that action must be taken to improve.

c. **Be useful for improvement.** The performance target can be set at any level, but just like the objective and the method of assessment, must be actionable. When the performance target is too far removed from the daily activities of the office, the office cannot make any changes that could allow for continuous improvement.

## Assessment Results (d)

The Assessment Results, submitted in the annual **Report**, are most importantly the numerical or qualitative data collected using the method(s) of assessment. This section can include a brief interpretation of the results in the context of the assessment, but only requires listing or description of the data.

The Assessment Results must include:

a. **The total number of students/faculty/reports involved.** The total number of participants in the assessment should be given, and if this is not possible, the range of the number of participants should be included. If giving a survey, the number of participants who were sent the survey and response rate should be calculated. If there were participants from substantially different populations, such as residential and distance learning students, the number from each office should be included.

b. **All relevant statistics (quantitative data) or themes (qualitative data).** The assessment results should include averages, means, medians, etc. as appropriate. All values or emergent themes needed to gain a holistic interpretation of the data should be included. It might also be important to include information on the demographics of the participants, but this information should only be included if it can significantly contribute to the analysis of the results. In qualitative methods, a summary including any relevant quotations from the data and insights gained should be added; there is no maximum to the amount of information that can be provided in the results.

c. **Alignment with the performance target.** The results should naturally flow from the objective, method, and performance target. This is especially the case with the use of percentages, counts, and survey results. If it was impossible to collect the data as intended, this should be discussed and the results as aligned with the enacted method must be provided.

## Use of Assessment Results (e)

In the cycle of assessment, each office and program should celebrate strong areas while looking for weak areas and addressing them. This section asks for the results to be interpreted and reflected upon in the context of the efficacy of the office. For an assessment cycle to move toward continuous improvement, there must be action steps taken to improve the achievement of the performance targets for future years, which are also listed in the Use of Assessment Results section.

The Use of Assessment Results must:

a. **Demonstrate appropriate reflection.** The key to continuous improvement is a thoughtful consideration of the meaning of the data and information collected in the assessment process to the practitioners. This can include reflection on the methods and targets as well as the implementation of the process, but should also include reflection on the factors contributing to the result. Evidence of reflection can come in various forms, but some text should be included that details the key insights gained from interpreting the data. Some questions that can guide the development of this section are: What do the data show? Are there any anomalies? Does anything stand out? What are we as a office thinking about differently as the result of this process?
b. **Include action items.** Offices and programs should look at and think about what improvements or developments will be implemented in light of the assessment results. Because the purpose of assessment is continuous improvement, within the process there must be adjustments made in some aspect of the office, office, or program based on results; these do not need to be substantial changes to offerings and should be considered in the context of changes enforced through other institutional actions. This section should state the actions that the office will take to continuously improve.
c. **Demonstrate collaboration.** It is essential that the assessment results have been read, discussed, and interpreted with multiple members of the office. Without collaborative discussion of the results, the use of assessment results is unlikely to lead to success. All stakeholder offices that were involved in the process should be listed. It is encouraged, but not required, that students be involved in the analysis of assessment data. Most importantly, assessment cannot be delegated to one member of the office and housed in an insular way.
d. **Not "continue to monitor."** Assessment results, when demonstrating that a performance target has been met, are not to be shelved and monitored alone. Successful interventions and offices are celebrated in the assessment process. However, it is important to note that the success of reaching a target is not a sign to cease the continuous improvement process but to adjust any component of the process for additional improvement. This could mean focusing on a different objective, adjusting to a higher target level, using an alternative or additional method, or exploring differential impacts of offices or programs on different offices of students in the interest of equity.

This set of Standards were developed from a review of SACSCOC policy and other published documentation along with past feedback and best practices. The IE team will continue to update these Standards based on changes in any of these areas, but any update will not be enforced in the same year it is generated. Based on this set of Standards, the IE team reviews and provides feedback regarding the assessment plan and report compliance with AVP area teams. The following rubrics summarize the compliance ratings.

# Assessment Rubrics and Review Flowchart

## Student Support Services Overall Rating Rubric

| Overall Rating | On Hold | Non-Compliant 2 | Non-Compliant 1 | Compliant |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | IE has approved a delay in the submission of the plan/report. | The Plan/Report does not meet minimum SACSCOC standards, is missing, or has not been corrected based on previous comments. | Minor revision or clarification is needed for some elements of the Plan/Report. | All elements of the Plan/Report meet SACSCOC standards. |

## Student Support Services Plan Component Ratings Rubric

| Component Ratings | Missing Element(s) | Unacceptable | Needs Work | Acceptable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Objective** | No Objective is present. | The Objective is not measurable as stated or is stated in terms of a task operational objective. | The Objective is unclear or not aligned with the mission and/or goals. | The Objective will produce actionable results for program improvement and is aligned with the mission and goals. |
| **Method of Assessment** | No stated method of assessment. | Methods of assessment are inappropriate, or not connected/specific to the Objective. | Methods of assessment need further description or refinement of the scoring criteria and/or process. | Scoring criteria and process are clear and appropriate for the method of assessment. The sample is identified if applicable. |
| **Performance Targets** | No performance target present. | Performance targets are not aligned with the method. | Performance targets need minor revisions for clarity. | Performance targets are appropriate and well-stated. |

## Student Support Services Program Report Component Ratings Rubric

| Component Ratings | Missing Element(s) | Unacceptable | Needs Work | Acceptable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assessment Results** | No assessment results present. | Assessment results are present, but it is unclear how they relate to methods. | Assessment results are unclear or exclude N values, etc. | All data are reported appropriately with a brief interpretation. |
| **Use of Assessment Results** | No reflection OR plan for utilization of results is present. | Reflection on results is not aligned with the outcome, method, and/or data, AND/OR Action plan does not say how results will be used to improve or change the program. | Reflection on assessment of results is at surface level, AND/OR the action plan is not grounded in the interpretation of the assessment results. | **Reflection on results indicates a sincere desire to improve student success. With meaningful interpretation of the data, the action plan is developed and includes a change to implement in the program.** |

## Assessment Review Flowchart

Each AVP area and College submits the assessment plans and reports. To maintain compliance with external agencies such as the SACSCOC, the IE team will review the document and provide feedback as detailed in Figure 5.

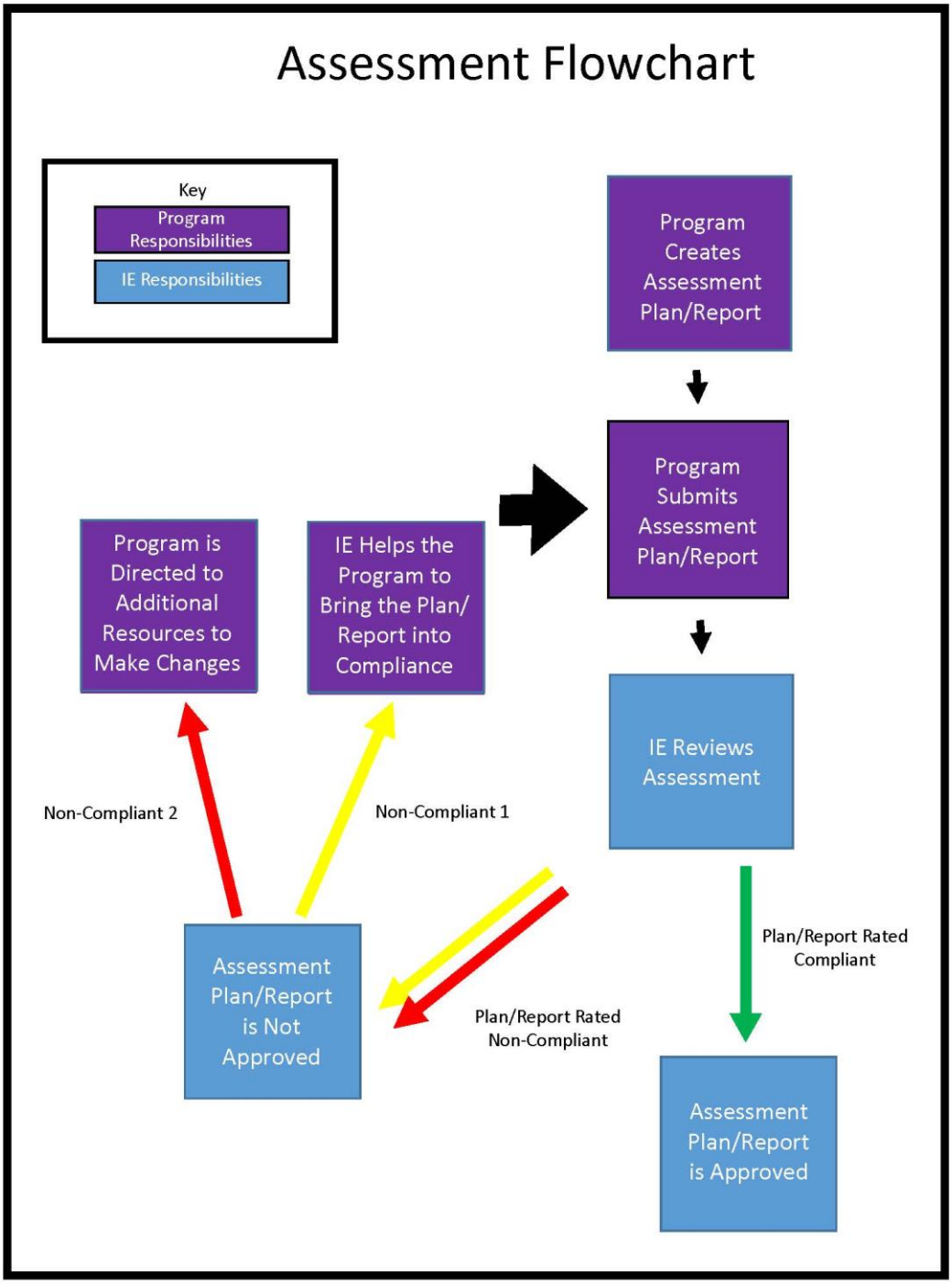



Figure 5. Assessment flowchart indicating responsible parties.

# PART 3: SYSTEM FOR ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT (SAM)

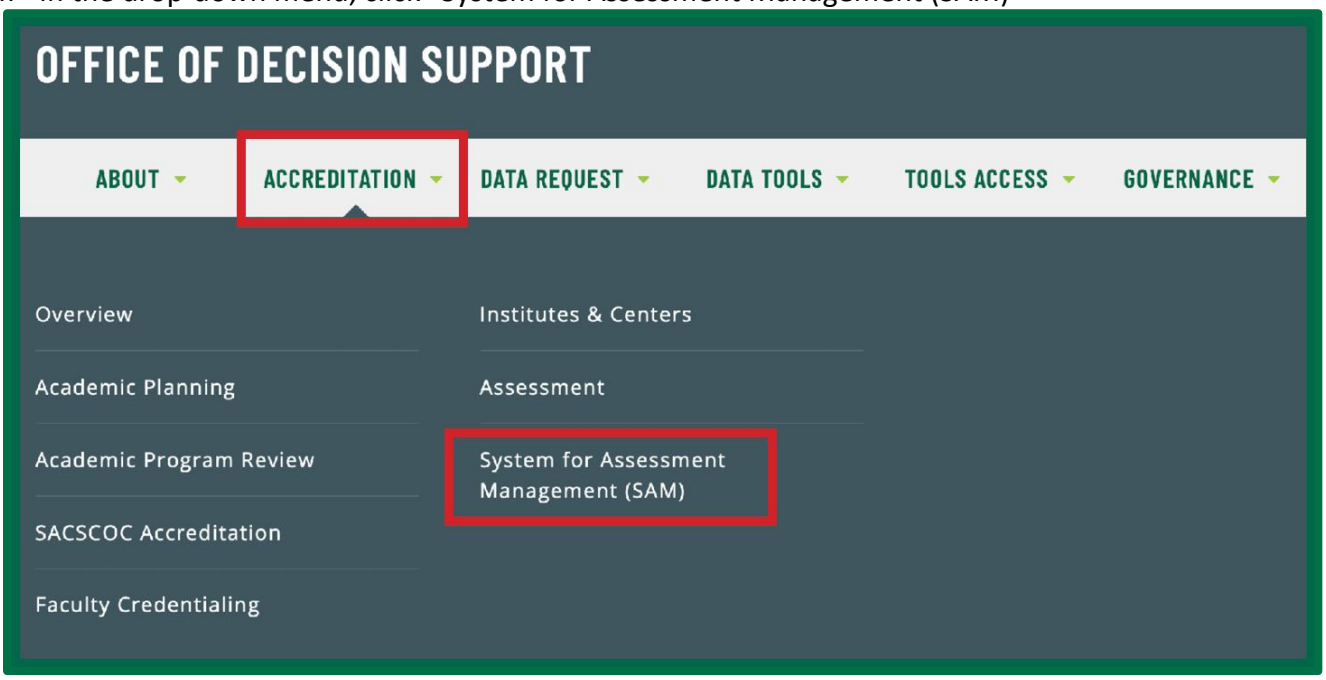
## Accessing SAM

Access to SAM is granted by the IE team and is integrated with the USF single sign-on network security allowing each user to login with Net ID and password.

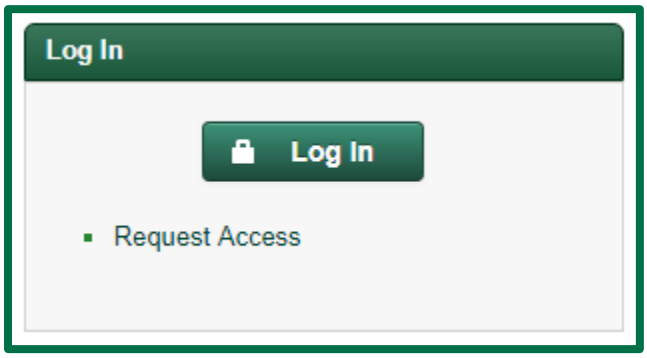
## Locating SAM

To access SAM, follow the instructions below.

1. Open your web browser
2. Go to usf.edu/ods
3. Click the "Accreditation" tab at the top of the screen
4. In the drop-down menu, click "System for Assessment Management (SAM)"




5. Click "Log In". You will be prompted to enter your NetID and password.
    - Note: If you never accessed SAM before, you may not have access. To request access to SAM click the "Request Access" link. Please see the following section on how to use the Request Access page.



## Requesting Access

On the Request Access page, you will need to input the following information:

- NetID;
- First Name;
- Last Name;
- Email;
- Select “Student Support Services” as the Assessment Office;
- Select “USF” for Campus;
- College or Division.

Once all the required information is selected, you will see a list of assessments appear in the section titled “Available Assessments”. Please select the assessments to which you need access, then click “Add”. Use Ctrl-Click or Shift-Click to select multiple assessments. Enter any unlisted assessments you need access to in the “Other Assessments” area.

By default, each user is given a “Contributor” role; however, you may request another role, if needed. There are three roles in SAM that a faculty or staff member may request:

- Contributor – This role is given to the faculty or staff member who is responsible for editing and submitting assessments; the person in this role receives updates, emails, and notifications regarding the assessment.
- Supervisor – This role is for someone who supervises the assessment, but is not directly involved with monitoring every single assessment plan/report (i.e., a Dean or a Chair); the person in this role may edit or submit the assessment information, but they will not receive updates, emails, and notifications regarding the assessment.
- Viewer – This role gives permission only to view the assessment, without the ability to edit or submit them; the person in this role does not receive updates, emails, and notifications regarding the assessment.

## SAM Access Request

NetID:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

*Please select the assessments that you need access to from the Available Assessments list below, then click Add. Use Ctrl-Click or Shift-Click to select multiple assessments. Enter any unlisted assessments you need access to in the Other Assessments area.*

Type:
Student Support Services

Campus:
USF

College / Division:
All

Available Assessments:

Admissions
College of Arts and Sciences Academic and Student Support Services
College of Behavioral and Community Sciences Office of Student Services
College of Education Academic and Student Support Services
College of Engineering Student Services
College of Nursing Academic Student Affairs and Undergraduate Student Success
College of Public Health Academic and Student Support Services
College of the Arts Student Academic Services and Advising Office
Community Engagement & Career Readiness
Cyber Florida Academic & Student Support Services

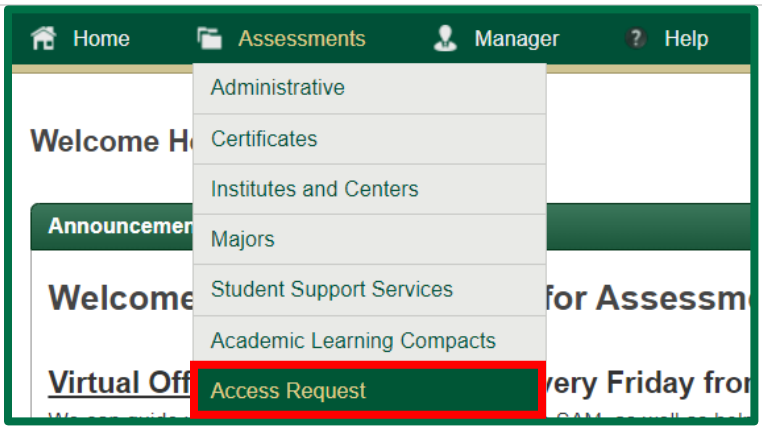
Add

Selected Assessments:

Remove

You will receive an email as soon as you have been granted access to the requested units.

**Please note, if you already have access to SAM, and need access to additional programs, you may request access to additional programs directly in SAM.** In the "Assessments" drop-down menu, please select "Access Request" as shown on the picture to the right. In the resulting page you will be able to select additional programs to which you need access.

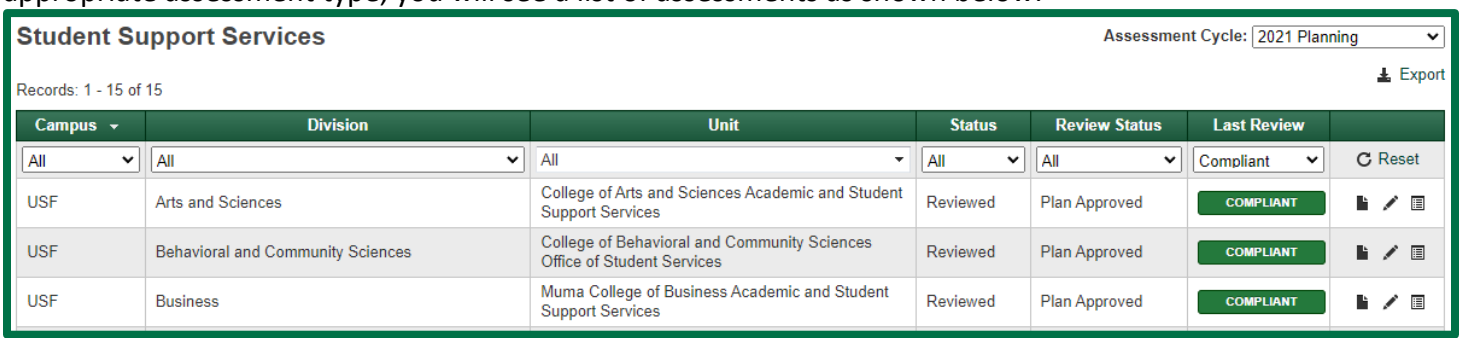


# Navigating SAM

## Homepage and Assessment List

When you have successfully logged into SAM, you will see the homepage with announcements about important information regarding upcoming due dates, changes to the assessment requirements, and other important information.

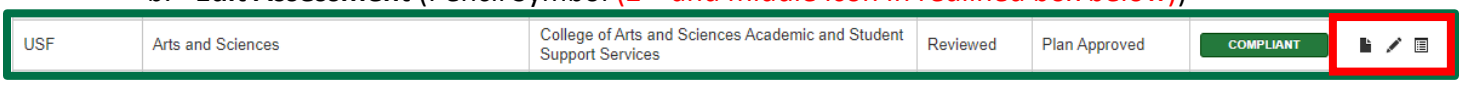

To see assessment **Plans** and **Reports** to which you have access, click "Assessments" as shown on the picture above and select assessment type from a drop-down menu (***the figure shows the managerial view; contributors will have access only to those assessment types to which they are assigned***); after you select the appropriate assessment type, you will see a list of assessments as shown below:



## Status Columns

Once the assessments to which you are assigned are visible, various information is contained in the Status columns. The first three columns are populated by IE (Campus, Division, Unit); however, please take a look at columns four through seven (four rightmost columns), which reflect the current status of the assessment.

1. **Status Column** shows the last action conducted on the assessment.
    a. **Not Started** – no assessment has been submitted to the system for the current cycle.
    b. **Edited** – the assessment was edited by the office, but not yet submitted.
    c. **Submitted** – the assessment has been submitted and awaits IE review.
    d. **Reviewed** – the assessment has been reviewed. You may go in and make adjustments if needed.
    e. **Reopened** – the assessment was viewed by the department, but there have been no edits made.
2. **Review Status Column** shows the status of the review by IE.
    a. **Plan/Report Not Reviewed** – the assessment was not reviewed; either it was not submitted, or we have not yet been able to review it.
    b. **Plan/Report Not Approved** – the assessment is not in compliance with SACSCOC standards, therefore adjustments to the assessments are needed.
    c. **Plan/Report Approved** – the assessment meets minimum SACSCOC standards.
    d. **In Review** – IE is in the process of reviewing the assessment. You cannot make edits if the plan/report is marked "In Review".
3. **Last Review** shows the degree of compliance and granted exceptions. See the rubrics above for additional information about the meaning of each rating.
    a. **Compliant** – the assessment meets minimum SACSCOC standards.
    b. **Non-Compliant 1** – minor edits are needed to bring the assessment into compliance.
    c. **Non-Compliant 2** – major issues with the assessment (e.g. missing elements).
    d. **On Hold** – the assessment was granted an extension or an exception.
    e. **New Programs** – recently created programs are only required to submit Plans.
4. **You may perform the following actions with the assessment.**
    a. **View Assessment** (Paper Symbol (1st icon in redlined box below))
    b. **Edit Assessment** (Pencil Symbol (2nd and middle icon in redlined box below))

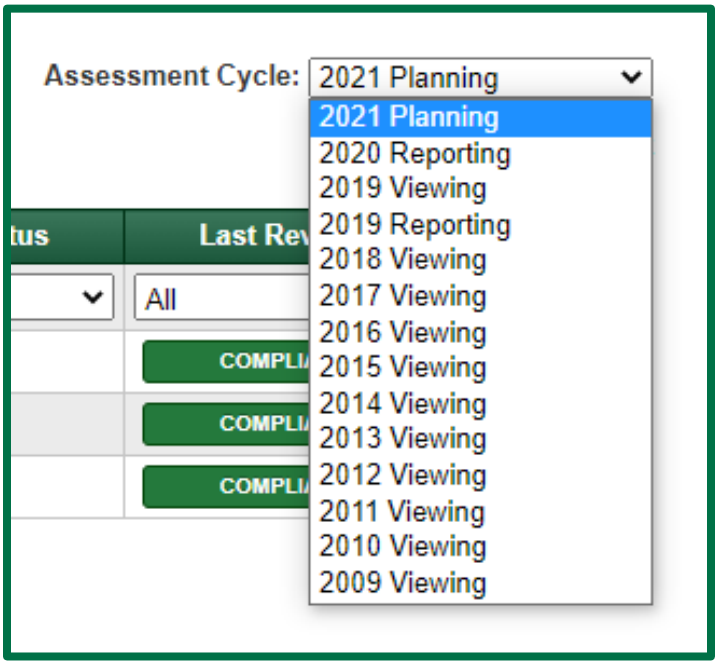


## Assessment Cycles

At the top-right corner, you will see the cycle selection. There are two concurrent cycles that you can work within SAM at any given moment:

1. **Plans**
   a. The Plan represents the upcoming year. Required assessment sections are:
   b. Objective Statement
   c. Method of Assessment
   d. Performance Target
2. **Reports**
   The Report represents the year that has passed. Required assessment sections are:
   a. Assessment Results
   **b.** Use of Assessment Results

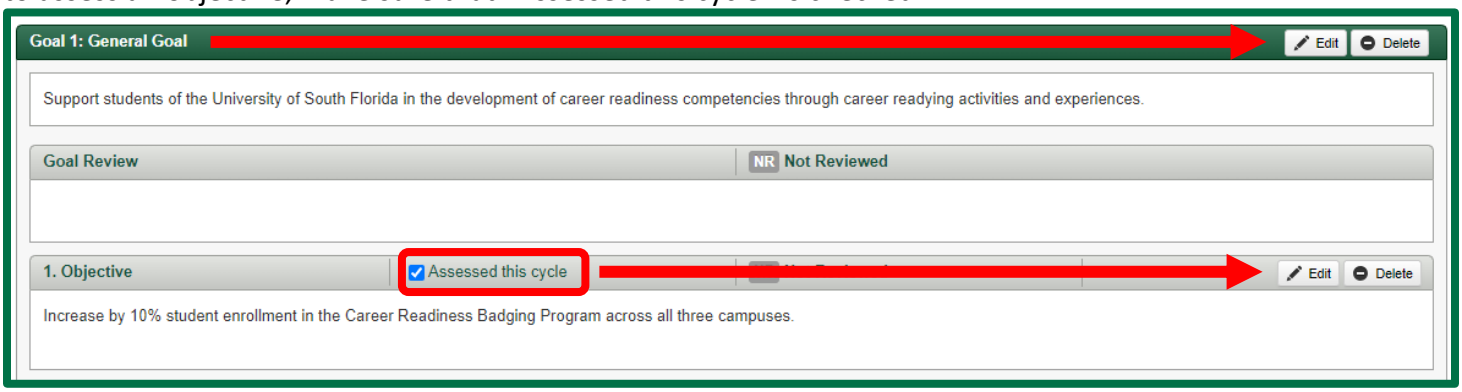
**Note: The "Assessment Cycle" drop-down menu, depicted in the image to the right, details the first semester of the academic year in which the plan or report is being submitted. Be sure to select the correct Cycle when submitting.**



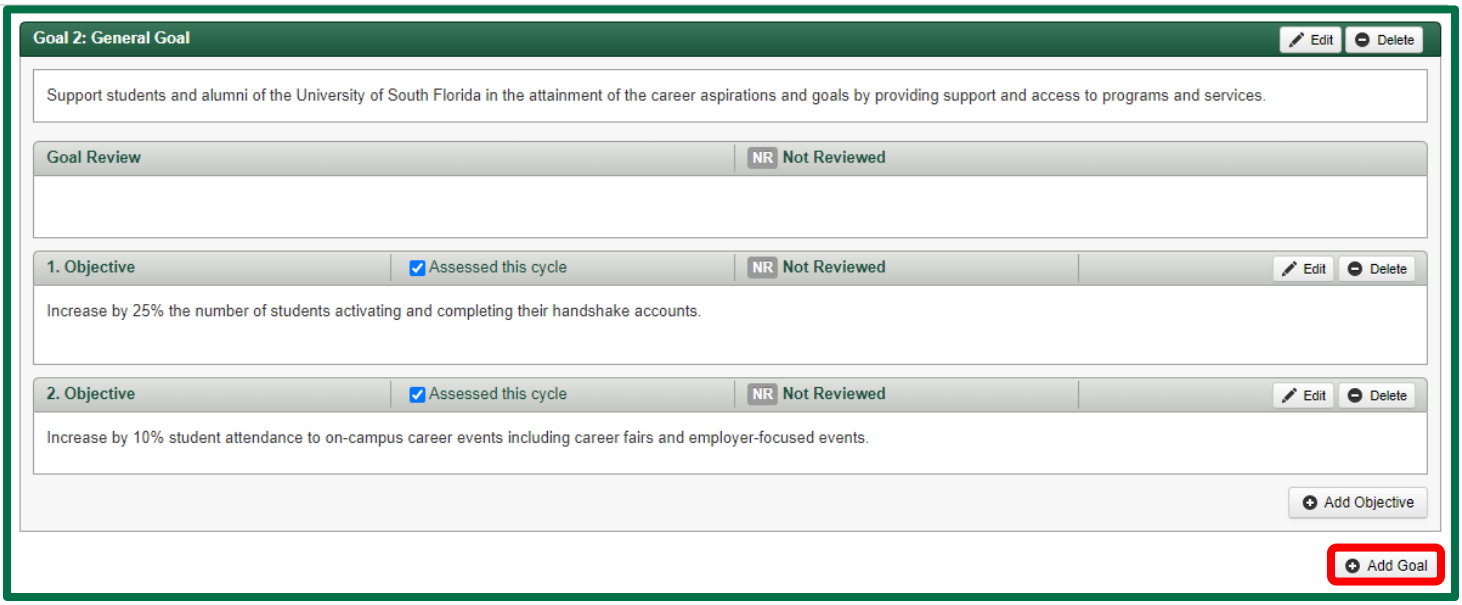

# Working with the Assessment Plan/Report

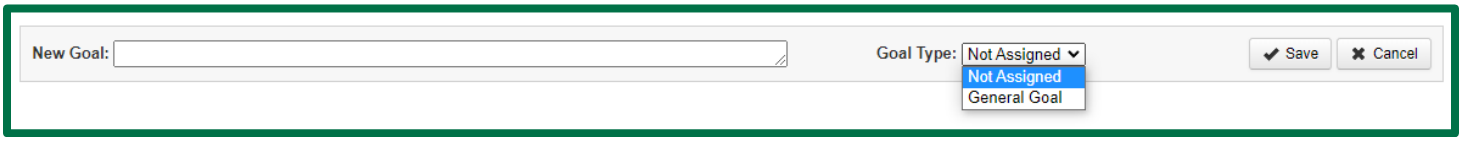
## Editing Goal/Objectives

To edit a goal or an outcome, click the edit button that is directly to the right of the object you wish to edit. ***Please note, if "Assessed this cycle" is unchecked, all the sections beside the Objective Statements will be hidden (e.g. Methods of Assessment, Performance Targets, Assessment Results, and Use of Assessment Results).*** Contributors will not be able to edit these sections nor will IE will able to review them. If you intend to assess an objective, make sure that "Assessed this cycle" is checked.




If you are adding a **new goal**, click "Add Goal" (see the redlined box in the lower right of the box below) and you will be able to select a new goal type and input a new goal statement. Please refrain from using partial phrases, and instead, use full sentences to state the goals ***(e.g. "Students admitted through the appeals process will be retained through their first academic year in the program."*** instead of ***"retention").***




## Submitting Assessment

To submit an assessment for review by IE, please scroll to the bottom of the assessment page and click "Review Submission". Clicking it will take you to a separate checklist page where all the sections are officeed by section type. On this page, the contributor will need to certify that her/his/their assessment plan/report adheres to the compliance standards. If you are satisfied with your assessment and you attest that the criteria have been met, you may check "Learning outcomes are ready for review" and click "Submit".

***Note: Whenever you make changes to the individual sections within the assessment plan/report, assessment remains in the "Edited" status. For IE to review the assessment, you need to finalize your changes by submitting the report.***

# PART 3: APPENDIX OF ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

## Improving Programs and Services: Assessment Drafting & Planning Worksheet

Use this document as a tool to devise a draft for the Assessment **Plan.** This document is designed to serve as a guide with questions to answer collaboratively to generate the components of the assessment. The best assessments are designed with and by the staff actively engaging with and mentoring students, with the focus on how the data collected can and will be used to inform improvements. Similarly, the best assessments stem from a process of inquiry, where the areas to be assessed are rooted in the mission of the office and the curiosity of the staff. This template is designed to facilitate inquiry for improvement.

**Begin by discussing:**

1. What are the most important things we want for USF and/or our students? What do we want the students to experience, be able to do, and know?
    a. What are the goals for the office, and which of these are most relevant to our work and interesting to us? Choose one of these goals to focus on:
        i. If the office has completed assessments before, what went well? What went poorly?
        ii. Is there anything that we have been thinking could be improved, but are unsure how?
        iii. What would be a surprise if we learned about the success of the office?

2. What does it mean for us if this goal is achieved? What if we are unsuccessful at achieving the goal? Can the goal be influenced by:
    a. The office, or its staff?
    b. The documents/applications/reports created and completed by the staff?
    c. Staff development?
    d. Resource allocation to the office?

No matter which goal is of interest, for assessment purposes it is important that the office has some degree of control over the result of the goal, directly or indirectly, as long as it can be communicated.

**Now that you've set the stage, move into drafting**:

3. Is the goal we are interested in aligned with one (or more) of the Enhanced General Education outcomes? In this case, the General Education outcome and its associated means of assessment can be incorporated in a co-curricular assessment model.

4. Can we dissect the goal we are interested in into measurable components? Consider the different things that must happen to achieve the goal. These typically are specific and observable student behaviors (e.g., students will attend a community service event, students will enroll in their second semester) or student claims (e.g., students will be satisfied with services) that can be logically connected to the overarching goal statement.
    a. When completed, these should be written as sentences detailing their specific topics and will become the objective(s) under each goal in the assessment plan.

5. How would an observer know that the objective has been achieved? Describe the tool/instrument (e.g., survey, dashboard, data, etc.) that you can use to determine if the objective was achieved; this is referred to as the method of assessment for the objective. Some potential tools are:
    a. Satisfaction/Exit Survey
    b. Rubrics completed by staff about student knowledge/ability
    c. Attendance/Counts by Context (i.e., sections of the library attended, questions asked of a guest speaker)
    d. Office of Decision Support Dashboards: retention, Finish in Four, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
    e. Stakeholder Surveys/Interviews
    f. Student reflection papers and/or interviews evaluated by staff.

6. How is this assessment tool administered or collected; is it embedded in a program and/or activity (i.e., Alternative Breaks Journal) or is it administered by an external office (i.e., NSSE)? Who has access to the data and can the information be reported under FERPA or additional ethical implications? In which areas and at what times is this objective demonstrated? Include this detail in the method of assessment section, such that the method could be reproduced by someone else in the office (this helps make the assessment sustainable even if there were to be turnover in the department).

7. What is an acceptable value of achieving the objective to indicate that the office is doing well? What baseline target would you set to identify whether the level of achievement is minimally acceptable (such as 90% of student government leaders graduating in four years or 80% of participants feeling satisfied with the customer service received)? When completed, this will become the performance target in SAM.

Your Assessment **Plan** is ready to be uploaded into SAM.

# Continuous Quality Improvement: Assessment Reporting Worksheet

Use this document as a tool to devise a draft for the Assessment **Report**:
For each objective (there may be more than one objective per goal):

1. Were you able to collect the data you had intended to? Why or why not? If the enacted practice differed from the plan, describe in detail the experience as an addendum to the method of assessment.

2. In assessment results, list appropriate raw and processed data; if there is an unreasonable volume of data, try to select only those data which directly relate to the objective.

3. Looking at the data, ask yourselves:
    a. Is this what we expected?
    b. How do the data align with our experiences throughout the year? Do the data corroborate/substantiate witnessed events while interacting with students?
    c. Are there any patterns?
    d. Are there any anomalies, such as unexpected, unintended, or provocative data?
    e. Do these data suggest any connections to external entities, programs, or ideas, or trends in the literature on student affairs?

4. What are your initial conclusions? Do you have any other data to substantiate these conclusions?
    a. Don't forget, the analysis should be framed around the contribution of the office to the results, not the students' pre-existing knowledge/effort

5. What new questions do these data bring you to ask? What do the data *not* say?

After analyzing the data:

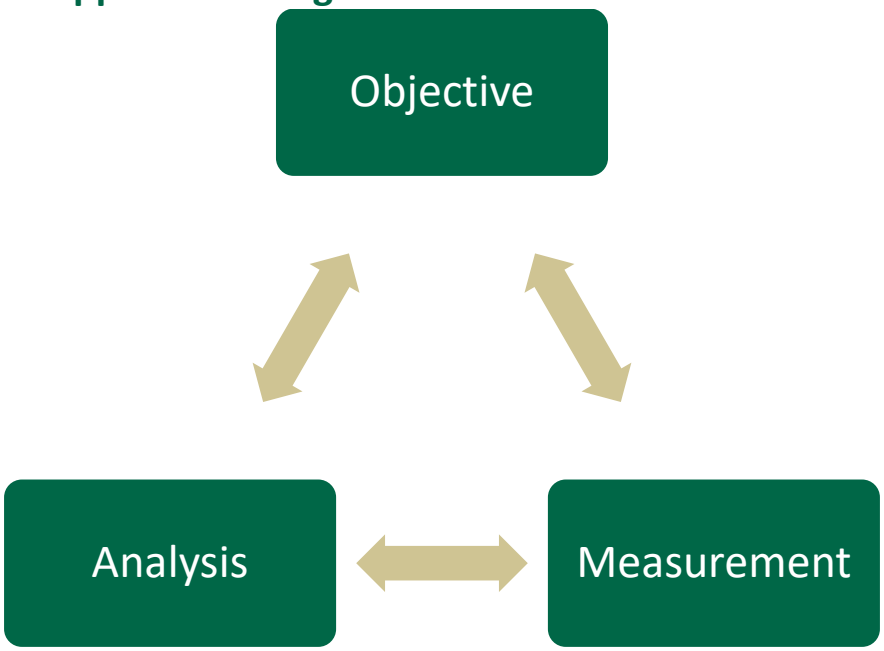
6. How might the data lead to improved practices? What can the office do differently to ensure that the objectives are achieved? what resources are available to facilitate the processes and activities? what resources are needed to accomplish this? with these reflections, complete use of assessment results.

7. What ***not*** to do:
    a. Sometimes when the office is very unsuccessful, it is tempting to devise action steps that focus on fixing students and their behaviors. Because we are interested in assessing the office and its goals, it is recommended to seek to integrate these types of activities with larger programmatic improvements that will reduce the need for such activities.
    b. Sometimes when the office is very successful it is tempting to avoid action items and merely "continue to monitor" the results. This is why thoughtful reflection in the development stage is so important to generate improvement ideas based on the experience of office staff.

Your Assessment **Report** is ready to be uploaded into SAM.

# Methods Supplements

## Method Supplement: Alignment




The term "alignment" emerges in assessment conversations, quality assurance conversations, and at the car repair shop. In the case of completing an assessment **Plan** and/or **Report**, we are guided to require alignment, as indicated in the Assessment Standards, from guidelines of our institutional accreditor, SACSCOC. In this context, alignment refers to the extent to which all components of an assessment strategy are related and connected. Our understanding of what we want students to know and experience, the strategies we use to measure knowledge, and the analyses we complete to determine if knowledge has been acquired should be connected in a reciprocal relationship, depicted in the figure.[4] The goal of alignment is to ensure that the decisions made based on assessment activities are supported by the strongest possible evidence.

[4] National Research Council. (2001). Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/10019.

## Methods Supplement: Survey Development

Writing a new survey to administer to any stakeholder can be an overwhelming process. This section contains some real-life interpretations of the highly technical language of scale development, which applies to both academic tests and surveys. It is important to consider some survey features that can make the survey the best it can be: Surveys are measurement tools, and should be carefully designed. The educational and psychological research communities discuss survey writing through the frame of **Fairness, Validity** (accuracy), and **Reliability** (precision).

We are trying to measure **constructs** when we deliver surveys; constructs are characteristics that we cannot necessarily see. For example, self-esteem is a construct that could be measured with a survey. Similarly, satisfaction with an event or service, enthusiasm, and perceptions are also constructs. For each construct we measure (one survey or test might have multiple constructs of interest), we want to collect as much important information as possible, and not collect information about other constructs. Not all data is created equal- only data that provides information about the construct that we're most interested in is important.

There is one guiding principle to generate high-quality surveys: *Ask questions about what you're interested in knowing*. This might seem self-evident, but often we add the questions we think we should to surveys (i.e., about demographic variables) without truly needing to collect that information. Most of our stakeholders (students, faculty, staff) are overwhelmed with the number of surveys and requests for feedback from various offices. By focusing on constructs, we can avoid contributing to "survey fatigue," which decreases both response rates and the quality of the information we collect. Following the research community's standards for fairness, validity, and reliability can help us to achieve this goal.

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## *Fairness*

To introduce fairness, the key is to consider ***each*** person who may interact with the survey, including those who will take the survey, those who will see the results of the survey, and those who will be impacted by any decisions made based on the survey results. When considering this, the goal is to remove construct-irrelevant variance: a difference in score based on something that is not the construct of interest. If construct-irrelevant variance were to occur in the data, our conclusions might be incorrect. Oftentimes, construct-irrelevant variance results in bias, in which certain offices of students (i.e., those learning English) consistently respond differently than other offices of students. This can occur when items are hurtful to offices of respondents, ask about sensitive information without need, and/or when items are distracting.[5] This could cause us to create unnecessary changes or share inaccurate data with our stakeholders and should be avoided.

One example of a question that might have issues with fairness might be a reflection question that includes a scenario based on a holiday celebration that occurs in some cultural traditions, but not others. Such an item would disadvantage students from different cultures from being able to provide a genuine response. Another common threat to fairness is in the administration of the survey; the relationship between survey-takers and proctors, the environment, timeframe, needing internet access, etc. are all characteristics that should be monitored to retain fairness, especially as they might distract respondents. Survey accessibility is an important factor in fairness; students using screen-reading software or other adaptive technology should have an equitable ability to participate.

When trying to create a fair survey, ask yourself: what will the participants' reading level be? What will their memory for the event in question be? What else might influence their responses, and how can I eliminate those influences? A key recommendation is to have a representative from each office of individuals impacted by the survey read the items and provide feedback before administering the tool.

[5] Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2021) Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines. https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/bias-and-sensitivity-guidelines.pdf

## *Validity (aka Accuracy)*

A perfectly valid instrument measures exactly what it intends to, and provides information appropriate to make decisions. In reality, every instrument has some variations in validity; the confidence interval of a public opinion poll is always reported in the same way that a kitchen scale reports the range in which it is accurate. In assessment, the instruments we use are multiple-choice questions, student counts, rubrics, and the like. The validity of these instruments will fluctuate in context, and while it is impossible to calculate some range of accuracy, some steps can be taken to increase the extent to which an instrument is valid.[6] At USF, we are asked to provide brief descriptions of the evidence for the validity of our assessments. This is because if assessment is to be used as a part of program-level decision-making, as it should, it should provide the highest quality information possible. Ideas for addressing both of these points are included here.

Validity as a whole is referred to as the extent to which ***evidence supports the use of data*** from the survey/test.[7] Some authors define different "flavors" of validity such as consequential validity, construct validity, and face validity.[8] We're giving the survey because we want to make an inference about something, be it a teaching style, an event, or a future possibility, and while a holistic instrument development designed to make decisions such as medical diagnoses should provide rigorous evidence to support each of these flavors, the purpose of program-level assessment is continuous improvement and does not require this level of rigor.

Evidence for validity can come from:

- No matter the tool, engaging more than one individual with subject matter expertise is a key strategy in the achievement of validity. If an expert generates an assessment, it is well on its way to providing high-quality information. However, there is always the possibility of idiosyncratic interpretation of the subject matter by one expert, and review and revision from external experts can serve as additional evidence. This can be accomplished through engaging with the curriculum committee or undergraduate committee in the department, a office of colleagues from a professional organization, and/or the other faculty teaching the course.
- In a multi-item survey, officeing a sub-score on items that refer to a specific construct can provide additional validity.
- Typically, the person designing a survey is not from the same office as someone responding to the survey. A way to check for this is to ask someone who might respond to describe their thought process out loud when reading the questions and to check that it matches the author's expectation.
- If possible, determine the extent to which the data accurately predicts or reflects the desired behavior or attitude change. This is typically explored after the data is collected, and can help guide future endeavors. If the responses to the survey are not related to future actions, maybe the survey is not measuring what we expect.
- It is important, especially if the questions will touch on sensitive subjects (sexual orientation, drug use, etc.), to ensure that the proper data safety channels are in place and the questions don't cause concern to the respondents.

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[6] Airasian, P.W. (1994). *Classroom Assessment* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill, Inc.

[7] American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education . (2014). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. AERA.

[8] Messick, S. (1988). Validity. In Linn, R.L. (Ed.), *Educational Measurement* (3rd ed.). Macmillan.

## *Reliability (aka Precision)*

Reliability refers to the extent to which an instrument/tool will provide consistent information: in multiple data collection events, across all items, and when observed by multiple experts.[9] A perfectly reliable instrument will produce the same measurement for the same student at the same level of satisfaction across administrations. In reality, every instrument has some lack of reliability; two subject matter experts can rate the same student performance on the opposite ends of a rubric in the same way that the same cupcake can present slightly different values on the same kitchen scale if placed twice. Reliability is easier to quantify than validity, but it can only be adequately determined when the data has already been collected. So, there should be evidence supporting reliability provided with the results of an assessment. This is important because inconsistent results would be ineffective to use in decision-making. With the description of reliability in mind, there are distinct methods for establishing reliability for different kinds of instruments:

A non-exhaustive list of methods for determining reliability is provided here:

1. Single-scale measures, like a quiz, test, or survey:
    - Alpha. The commonly reported coefficient alpha measures the extent to which variance in the data is likely accounted for by the "true" differences between responses, and is relatively easy to calculate. It is best applied in single-outcome scales in which all items are expected to equally contribute to the true score (learn more here).
    - Omega. Omega measures the extent to which variance is accounted for by true variance, like alpha, but also accounts for situations when some items might have higher relationships to the true value than others (learn more here and here).
    - Coefficient H. H does a similar measurement to alpha and omega, but should only be used when the score of items will be weighted such as when some survey questions are given more weight because they are more difficult (learn more here).
2. Pre-test/post-test:
    - Test-retest reliability seeks to understand the extent to which a scale, like a survey of students' experiences, provides the same measurement at multiple times; assuming the "true" value is also the same (learn more here).
3. Using a rubric with multiple raters:
    - Host a norming session. One way to establish the consistency of scores when multiple raters are required, as is the case with any rubric assessment here at USF, is to complete a norming session wherein sample artifacts are scored by the team and discrepancies are discussed to determine alignment for future scoring.
    - Inter-rater agreement. Inter-rater agreement is the simplest method for determining consistency between raters and can be calculated simply by averaging the scores across multiple raters. See the Academic Assessment Standards for an example.
    - Cohen's kappa is a more advanced calculation that allows for the determination of the improvement from chance agreement in the data. When looking at a large number of artifacts, this more advanced calculation is helpful to provide further evidence for the confidence that the program can have in the assessment results (learn more here).

[9] Ibid.

## Use of Assessment Results Supplement

Collecting data, especially large amounts of data, can lead to “analysis paralysis” and it is challenging to determine what is the best next step to take. Here are some ideas of tangible improvements that would be compliant with SACSCOC requirements, if warranted by the assessment data. In the Report due after each assessment cycle, there is a requirement to include a description of the actionable steps that the program will take to achieve improvements and/or to maintain an already high level of achievement.

1. Engage in Journey Mapping or another strategy to include key learning opportunities across experiences to explore learning outcome development from an entry to an exit level.
2. Revisit or revise assessment method
3. Revisions to activities/offerings
4. Development of new activities/offerings
5. Pedagogical/Service innovations. Explore the new literature to determine any potential activities.
6. Identifying areas for staff development
7. Share the results with the various members of the AVP area, and stress the importance of the areas that were identified as being weak during the assessment, so that staff members are aware of the areas where students are struggling and adjust services/activities/offerings accordingly.
8. Don’t forget!
    a. It is not compliant to devise action steps that focus on “fixing” students, because we are interested in assessing the service as a whole and over a longer time than any individual office.
    b. Statements such as “we will continue to monitor” achievement without thoughtful reflection and actionable next steps are also not compliant. When the achievement of the Objective is high, it is a great sign that the office is meeting its goals. This means that it would be appropriate to move to another objective, increase expectations, and/or expand the level of the assessment (i.e., from a sample of students to a larger population).