

## Academic Program Assessment

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### Overview

Academic assessment is an ongoing process and focuses on the use of results to make data-driven decisions regarding improvements to outcomes and assessment methods. Faculty members in each academic program should engage in assessment on an annual basis. Texas A&M University utilizes WEAVEonline, an online system, to document and report assessment. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Evaluation reviews and evaluates all assessment plans each year.

How the Assessment Plan is Assessed:

- 1) Documentation of the assessment process
- 2) Articulation of how and what student learn
- 3) Strategies for continual improvement of learning.

The assessment plan comprises of seven sections: Mission, Outcomes Measures, Targets, Findings, Action Plans, and Analysis Questions. These sections are the *Why, What, How, and Now What* of assessment.



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## Mission

The mission statement serves as the foundation of a quality assessment plan because it defines the purpose and intent of the program or unit. The mission statement should be specific, clear, and concise. It should also identify what the students should be able to accomplish once completing the program.

### *Example:*

The Educational Technology program prepares educators to design, develop, implement, and evaluate technology-based educational materials and methods, as well as to conduct research on the effectiveness of specific design features of educational materials and methods. Our courses emphasize students' development of a) skills necessary for developing instructional and research resources utilizing current and emerging technologies, b) abilities to apply instructional design models to the development of effective instruction, and c) an understanding of how people learn in these interactive environments. Courses typically employ a project-based approach in which students design media-rich resources that are evaluated through feedback from both peers and faculty. Graduates of the master's degree program are employed in a wide variety of settings, frequently serving as instructional designers in corporations or as technology leaders in K-12 school districts and higher education institutions.

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## Outcomes/Objectives

Learning outcomes are concrete statements that describe what students are supposed to know or be able to do as a result of participating in a program. The plan should contain **at least three** learning outcomes that are measurable, placed within the context of the discipline, and can be mapped to the university-level outcomes.

Some programs may also choose to include program-based objectives or goals, which are typically tied to the achievement of a program, but not specifically related to student learning. This is acceptable as long as the plan contains at least three learning based outcomes.

### *Student Learning Outcome Examples:*

Graduates of the BIED program will demonstrate that they have mastered required content knowledge and skills required of a highly certified, entry-level educator by applying knowledge from core-curriculum, disciplined-based courses, and field-based experiences.

Graduates will learn how to develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling guidance program.

### *Program Outcome Example:*

In the Educational Administration Ph. D. program, the traditional expectation for Ph.D. graduates to enter the academy as a professor, is expanded to include entering the ranks of senior administration in P-12 schools, or entering the academy in an administrative/ staff role. The outcome is for the Ph.D. graduates will be in such roles in higher education.

## Measures

A "Measure" is the WEAVEonline term for the tools utilized to evaluate the extent to which an outcome is achieved. All outcomes must have at least one measure and the measure must contain sufficient detail about how data will be evaluated. Supporting documentation such as sample rubrics, an essay prompt, or an overview of a national examination should be provided.

### Types of Measures

| Direct Measures  | Indirect Measures   |
|--|---|
| Direct method is based on an analysis of student behaviors or products in which they demonstrate how well they have mastered learning outcomes.  | Indirect method is a report of perceived student learning. These measures are best utilized in conjunction with a direct measure.   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Capstone projects</li> <li>• Business plan evaluation</li> <li>• Journal articles</li> <li>• Standardized benchmark exams</li> <li>• Clinical simulations</li> <li>• Dissertation/thesis and defense</li> <li>• Exit exams</li> <li>• Course-embedded assignments and exams</li> <li>• Internship</li> <li>• Performance piece (e.g. musical, or dance recital)</li> <li>• Practicums</li> <li>• Poster presentation</li> <li>• Portfolios/e-portfolios</li> <li>• Rubrics or evaluations of performance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Graduate               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alumni</li> <li>○ Student satisfaction</li> <li>○ Focus groups</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Job placement statistics</li> <li>• Graduation and retention rates</li> <li>• Course evaluations</li> <li>• Teaching evaluations</li> <li>• Grade correlations</li> <li>• Participation Statistics</li> </ul> |

Each method has limitations which are listed below. An ideal assessment plan combines both direct and indirect measures from a variety of sources to gather comprehensive evidence of student learning.

| Type     | Strengths  | Weaknesses  |
|----------|--|---|
| Direct   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires students to demonstrate knowledge</li> <li>• Provide data that directly measure achievement of expected outcomes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not everything can be demonstrated in a direct way</li> <li>• Can be more time consuming to implement</li> </ul>   |
| Indirect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clues about what could be assessed directly</li> <li>• Easy to administer</li> <li>• Useful for ascertaining values and beliefs</li> <li>• Can assess implicit qualities of learning, such as values, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides only impressions and opinions</li> <li>• Return rates are usually low</li> <li>• May take more time to carry out</li> <li>• May have response bias</li> </ul> |

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## Targets

"Targets" indicate a level which will define success towards achieving a particular Outcome or Objective. Targets should be specific and measurable, aligned with the measure being utilized, and represent a reasonable level of success. Each outcome and measure should have a relationship to the target. Targets should be justified based on benchmarks, previous results, national standards, etc.

Please note that there are no consequences at the university level for not achieving targets, as the assessment process is about continuous improvement.

### *Examples:*

Current Texas standards for accountability for educator preparation programs require > 85% of candidates (in all groups) achieve a passing score on TExES certification examination, within the academic year of program completion. 100% of candidates should achieve a passing score on the state exam.

90% of Kinesiology students will score acceptable on all Student Teaching Supervisor evaluation indicators related to personal and social responsibility.

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## Findings

"Findings" are the calculated results based on the data collected. "Findings" should provide solid evidence and enough detail to show that Targets were met, partially met, or not met. Findings should be consistent with Targets and provide information about the significance of the results (e.g. comparisons with past findings, or contextual information possibly explaining the results).

Programs are not expected to measure all outcomes every year. Some departments create rotation cycles to focus on one or two outcomes within a given year. If a measure is not being used, be sure to mark "Not Reported this Cycle" when updating the WEAVEonline tool.

### *Examples:*

In the 2015-2016 academic year, students in the undergraduate programs were again assessed using the Written Communication VALUE rubric. Writing artifacts for this year's scoring were collected from the course that precedes internship at the end of the program. Four categories are assessed in this rubric: Style, Idea, Organization and Conventions. In each area, the mean score was higher in the samples that were scored in 2016. The mean scores in each area were Style=2.49, Idea=2.66, Organization=2.63, and Conventions= 2.46. In this assessment cycle, 87.8% of students assessed achieved a score over 2, which represented an increase of 13.8%. The target was set at 80% achieving a score of 2 or above, thus the target was met.

100% of 2nd year students were categorized as 'Accomplished' with 'Recognizes deviations from the expected' as the lowest rated item with a 3.4/4. 87% of 1st year students (13/15) were categorized as 'Developing'. This target was not met.

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## Action Plan(s)

Each program is required to establish **at least one** new Action Plan within each assessment cycle, regardless of whether all targets were met. The action plan is the “what now” of your assessment plan and provides programs with an opportunity to discuss plans to improve the program, as informed by the findings. The Action Plan should include specific details supporting its implementation and completion. In addition, it is important to include steps within the action plan that seek to **improve student learning** not change the **assessment processes**. Stating that the action plan is to ‘continue existing practices’ is not sufficient.

### *Example:*

Description: In the CEHD Critical Thinking Test, 64% of AHO students scored above a 2 overall, higher than the average score for all CEHD students (62%). Students appeared to struggle most with two measures (1) clearly stating their position, perspective, or thesis, and (2) arrive at a reasoned conclusion and/or outcome. In order to improve student performance in stating a position/thesis and arriving at conclusions/outcomes, HLTH 481 classes will address and practice these skills earlier during the semester. The results will be re-evaluated in fall 2015, with an adjusted success rate of 70% of students scoring above a 2 overall on the CEHD Critical Thinking Test.

Implementation Description: In order to improve student performance in stating a position/thesis and arriving at conclusions/outcomes, HLTH 481 classes will address and practice these skills earlier during the semester. The results will be re-evaluated in fall 2015, with an adjusted success rate of 70% of students scoring above a 2 overall on the CEHD Critical Thinking Test.

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## Analysis Questions 1

The purpose of this question is discuss next steps for assessment and how the action plan(s) was developed. Similar to the action plan, the response to this question should include an explanation based on findings from the current year's assessment cycle. The response should also discuss the reasons why you believe these next steps will improve future learning.

*Example:*

Several changes are planned to address areas for improvement identified in the 2014-15 assessment cycle. While 100% of candidates for the Superintendent's certificate have successfully passed the Texas Assessment of Educational Standards (TExES) and obtained their certificates, there were two areas of competency in which fewer than 70 % of completers achieved 70% passing scores. To more effectively address those areas of proficiency, the faculty has determined that three changes will be implemented within the program. To address candidate, need for proficiency related to student services and issues related to the physical plants and educational facilities, assignment of the course in which those topics are examined will be limited to an experienced Texas superintendent, who also meets all other University requirements for teaching doctoral level courses. In addition, the program will begin requiring participation in a practice testing session, to provide feedback and build familiarity with the testing format for those doctoral candidates taking the TExES examination. In addition, to address Competency 007, which requires proficiency in using data to address program improvements, faculty will require recommendations related to data findings.

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## Analysis Question 2

The purpose of the second question is to provide an update of Action Plans established in the previous assessment cycles. The response should also use this as an opportunity to discuss how/if previous action plans improved results for outcomes. If there were no improvements or the results were not as intended, then provide a response as to why.

*Example:*

Two of the three previous action plans were specifically directed at raising the exit exam score given in KINE 483. These included adding a review session for the exam and providing a take home exam that would be graded and returned to the student prior to their taking the exam that semester. Although we have still not met the target for the percent of people scoring 70% or greater on the exam, we have improved that percentage from the 26% to 37.5%. Since this exam represents the culmination of knowledge for the AEP major, we find it encouraging that some improvement has occurred. Therefore, we will keep these action plan active. The other action plan that has students completing a project during their final semester will also stay active as we believe that this activity is also contributing to higher scores on the exit exam.