2020-2021 ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDELINES

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Foreword

The purpose of academic program assessment is for faculty to gather information about what and how students are learning, discuss that information as a faculty group, and use it to inform continuous improvement efforts within the academic program. By extension, these efforts aid in enhancing the educational experience for students, improving program learning outcome (PLO) assessment results, further developing students’ skills in the identified PLOs, and actively involving program faculty in the curricular assessment and quality improvement process. The information presented in each section of this manual defines Texas A&M University’s expectations for the documentation of PLO assessment. This “how-to” manual is designed to guide academic programs through the academic program assessment process, highlight best practices, and facilitate self- and peer-review of Assessment Plans and Assessment Reports.

As of Spring 2019, academic programs across TAMU document program assessment efforts in AEFIS (Assessment, Evaluation, Feedback, and Intervention System), an integrated, comprehensive, online assessment platform. Based on feedback from faculty and staff involved in the assessment process over the years, and in an effort to support a more manageable and meaningful assessment process, the following steps were taken with the implementation of AEFIS:

1. The documentation of academic program assessment has been segmented into three distinct components: (1) the Assessment Plan, (2) the Assessment Report, and (3) the Status Update & Distance Education Report;
2. The assessment review cycle has been extended to approximately 18 months, more reflective of a typical academic program assessment cycle (see page 28); and,
3. New strategies have been implemented to provide more timely feedback regarding ongoing assessment efforts.

These changes are briefly outlined in the following sections.
Components of Academic Program Assessment

The sections of this companion manual follow the same order of the sections comprising the Assessment Plan and Assessment Report, as outlined below.

NOTE: Each section of this companion manual includes an FAQ list. The FAQs in blue text include technical information and address functionality within the AEFIS system.

Assessment Plan. The Assessment Plan, completed each spring semester, identifies which program learning outcomes (PLOs) will be assessed during the upcoming academic year, as well as the measures and targets that will be used to assess each PLO. Programs may identify as many PLOs as they see fit to assess in a given year as long as at least one is assessed each academic year.

Components making up the Assessment Plan:
- Program Description
- Program Learning Outcome(s)
- Measures
- Targets

Assessment Report. The Assessment Report, completed each fall semester, summarizes assessment findings or results gathered over the course of the previous academic year (as outlined in the previously established Assessment Plan). Also included in the Assessment Report are data-informed actions, which are based on the assessment results. These data-informed action(s) are changes which will be implemented in the future, and at least one data-informed action designed to strengthen/improve one of the assessed PLOs (i.e., a curricular change) is required each year.

Components making up the Assessment Report:
- Findings
- Data-Informed Actions

Status Update & Distance Education Report (formerly Assessment Reflections & Closing the Loop). Like the Assessment Report, this final report is completed in the fall semester.

Status Update on a Previously Identified Action
Program Coordinators are asked to identify a recently-implemented curricular change (i.e., ideally a fully implemented action) to improve a specific PLO presented in the Plan. In this narrative, program faculty summarize subsequently gathered assessment data used to determine whether or not the described change(s) led to improvements in the targeted PLO(s).

Distance Education Program Effectiveness
Distance Education programs (i.e., those for which >50% of the curriculum is available via technology) receive a version of this form in which they are prompted to provide evidence that the program engages in a systematic review of the effectiveness given the unique mode of delivery. This includes a summary of the data sources and metrics that are reviewed annually and how those data are used to ensure high-quality learning and a rich educational experience regardless of mode of delivery.
Academic Program Assessment Cycle at Texas A&M University

Academic programs engage in an approximately two-year assessment cycle during which faculty assess the effectiveness of their programs in meeting identified PLOs. The specific dates will vary slightly by cycle.

2020-2021 Assessment Cycle

NOTE: Assessment Plans are normally due each Spring semester; however, the AY 2020-21 Plan deadlines were postponed until the Fall 2020 semester to better accommodate faculty due to temporary changes the University instituted in response to the spread of COVID-19.

ASSESSMENT PLAN:
- September 4, 2020: DRAFT of Assessment Plans submitted to internal Assessment Liaisons for feedback
- October 2, 2020: Assessment Liaisons submit feedback to programs
- November 20, 2020: Final Assessment Plans submitted to OIEE¹

FALL 2020 – SPRING 2021: Data collection efforts ongoing as described in the AY 2020-21 Assessment Plan

ASSESSMENT REPORT:
- October 22, 2021: DRAFT of Assessment Reports submitted to internal Assessment Liaisons for feedback
- By November 12, 2021: Assessment Liaisons submit feedback to programs
- December 3, 2021: Final Assessment Reports submitted to FINAL APPROVERS (DEPT)
- December 17, 2021: Last date for Department Approvers to review and submit approved Reports

STATUS UPDATE & DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT (formerly Assessment Reflections & Closing the Loop):
- End of October/Early November 2021: Report forms available in Action Items
- December 3, 2021: Report submitted to OIEE
  - OIEE will submit feedback by no later than January 31, 2022

¹ Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation
Using AEFIS to Document Annual Program Assessment

Getting Started

Faculty and staff who are responsible for the submission of Assessment Plans/Reports are called Program Coordinators in AEFIS. Program Coordinators use their NetID and password to log in to AEFIS (tamu.aefis.net).

Program Coordinators may refer to the AEFIS User Guide for a step-by-step walkthrough of logging in, accessing, and submitting assessment forms. This visual guide includes helpful tips, things to remember, and information about system features that Program Coordinators may find useful as assessment is documented in AEFIS (such as using Tasks and Notes to communicate with other Program Coordinators in the system).

Accessing Program Assessment Forms

Assessment forms assigned to Program Coordinators will appear in the Action Items list on the right side of the browser after logging in to AEFIS. Click the blue pencil icon to edit the information in the program assessment form. If the Action Items list does not automatically appear, it can be accessed by clicking on the bell icon at the top right of the screen.

Please pay particular attention to the academic year listed on the form in which you are working. At any given time, there are active Program Assessment forms for two assessment cycles—the cycle for which the Plan is being documented and the cycle for which the assessment is occurring and the Report is being documented. Sometimes those forms will both be visible in the Action Items list. Program Coordinators should verify they are working in the correct form.

Upon opening the 2020-21 assessment form, Program Coordinators will find information is already entered in some fields. The following information has been pre-populated in the 2020-21 forms:

- The mission statement from the 2019-20 form (pre-populated into the “Discipline-specific purpose” text box in the Program Description section)
- All Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) entered into the 2018-19 and 2019-20 forms
- All Measures and Targets from the 2019-20 form under each existing PLO

Submitting Program Assessment Forms

Throughout the assessment documentation cycle Program Coordinators will submit the Plan twice, the Report twice, and the Status Update & DE Report once (see page 28 for a graphic representation of the assessment cycle). When submitting the 2020-21 Plan for the first time, it will be sent to the Assessment Liaison for internal feedback. Simply click the “I’m Finished, Submit” button at the bottom of the form to do so.

For all submissions after the initial submission an additional step is required. There will be two additional buttons above the “I’m Finished, Submit” button: “Approve Form” and “Reject Form.” In order to successfully submit the form, “Approve Form” must be selected first. This button indicates the form should move to the next step in the workflow. The “Reject Form” button indicates the form should move back a step in the
workflow. Program Coordinators will likely not use the “Reject Form” button very often, if at all (for example, it may be used in rare cases when the Assessment Liaison asks for the form to be sent back to them).

**NOTE:** After receiving feedback on the Assessment Plan from OIEE, Program Coordinators may update the Program Description, PLOs, Measures, and/or Targets as they see fit. However, the form should **NOT** be submitted again until the Assessment Report (Findings and Data-Informed Actions) is due the following fall semester. Simply use the “Continue Later” button to save any changes made to the form. The form will conveniently remain in the Action Items list over the course of the AY for easy access as assessment data is gathered.

After the Program Coordinator submits a form it will not display on the Action Items menu; however, it is still accessible to view by the Program Coordinator from the dashboard widget labeled *My Data Collection Forms*. Simply click the three-dot icon at the top right of the widget and filter by “In Progress Forms.”

**Email Notifications**

When feedback is sent to Program Coordinators—whether from the Assessment Liaison or OIEE staff—the system automatically sends an email notification indicating that an assessment form is available on the Program Coordinator’s Action Items list with feedback. The sender of these notifications is listed as “The Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation,” but the notifications are sent automatically by the AEFIS system. **Please read these email notifications carefully as they provide important information, such as who provided feedback, next steps and future deadlines, and technical information about the AEFIS system.**

**NOTE:** If you have a student email address (@email.tamu.edu) in addition to a work email address (@tamu.edu), you may need to forward these notifications from your student account to your work account. AEFIS receives a nightly update from the University’s Student Information System, during which student email addresses overwrite work email addresses. Therefore, if you do not believe you are receiving these notifications please check your student email account and set up the forwarding service.
Assessment Support

Academic programs and internal Assessment Liaisons are supported in their assessment efforts by OIEE assessment consultants. Each academic college/branch campus is assigned to an assessment consultant within OIEE as follows:

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<thead>
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<th>OIEE Staff Member and Contact Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia Dorsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:amdorsey@tamu.edu">amdorsey@tamu.edu</a></td>
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OIEE staff work closely with the college/branch campus Assessment Liaisons throughout the year to ensure training, expectations, and deadlines are clearly communicated to all programs. Requests for additional training or questions can be submitted to assessment@tamu.edu. Program Coordinators and program faculty involved in the assessment process are welcome to contact the relevant consultant listed above for guidance on assessment efforts.

On the following pages, each section of the Assessment Plan and Report are outlined in detail. Please use this manual as a guide as the program works to plan and document the assessment process.
Program Description

The Program Description section of the Assessment Plan outlines the discipline-specific purpose and focus of the program(s) to be assessed. A strong program description communicates the skills and knowledge students will have at the end of their experience and what students will be prepared to do with these skills and knowledge after graduation. Along with the description, programs are asked to provide information about the following:

1. **Geographic location of delivery**

   Programs should clearly state the physical geographic location of program delivery. This refers to the campus (College Station, Galveston, Qatar) and/or the alternate geographic location (e.g., City Centre in Houston, HSC in Bryan, Dallas, McAllen, etc.). If the program is available at multiple geographic locations please enter each site, separated by a comma or semicolon.

   **NOTE:** Fully online programs (i.e., programs that do not offer any of the curriculum face-to-face) should simply type *Delivered via technology* in this text box. Programs that are offered both online and face-to-face might enter something like this: *College Station campus, via technology*.

2. **Mode of delivery**

   Programs are prompted to select one of three options:

   (1) **Face-to-Face (FTF):** Most of the curriculum (>50%) is only available to students in person.

   (2) **Via technology (>50% of the curriculum):** More than half or all of the curriculum (>50%) is available to students through asynchronous web-based delivery and/or through synchronous delivery where content is delivered real-time but the instructor and student(s) are in different geographic locations.

   (3) **Both:** The program is available in both modalities: face-to-face and via technology. That is, students choose whether to enroll in the FTF or DE program/option.

3. **Format of delivery**

   Programs are prompted to select one of three options:

   (1) **Synchronous:** Instruction is available to and accessed by students in real time with the instructor.

   (2) **Asynchronous:** Instruction does not occur in real time. Instructors provide content which the student can access via technology.

   (3) **Both:** Programs utilizing both synchronous and asynchronous methods should select this option.

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3 The Program Description section does not have specific feedback criteria. Only qualitative feedback is provided.
NOTE: In cases where two or more programs with different modes and/or formats of delivery are included in the same Assessment Plan, please follow these instructions:

1. In the Purpose text box, clearly state the geographic location, mode of delivery, and format of delivery for each credential included in the Assessment Plan. This is in addition to the discipline-specific purpose and focus of the program.

2. For Mode of Delivery and Format of Delivery, please select the option that applies to the Distance Education program included in the Assessment Plan. If the Assessment Plan includes more than one Distance Education credential with differing modes and formats of delivery, DO NOT select “Both” from the drop-down menu. Choose only one of these credentials and select the option(s) that apply to that credential. In the Purpose text box, be sure to clearly state the credential to which these selections apply.

FAQs

Q: How should we respond to the Program Description prompts?

A: Most non-DE programs will follow Scenario #1 below. For DE programs and for combined Assessment Plans (i.e., Plans that include two or more departmental programs of the same degree level OR two or more programs in the same discipline with different degree levels), please be sure to address the purpose and focus of each individual credential in the text box labeled “Discipline-specific purpose and focus of program(s)”.

In addition, clearly list the geographic location, mode, and format of delivery for each program in this text box. Please see the NOTE at the top of this page and the examples below which outline how combined program assessment plans should address each requirement in the Program Description section of the form.

Scenario #1: Program offered at a single location
   - Purpose: Description and purpose of program
   - Geographic Location: List location (e.g., College Station, Dallas, etc.)
   - Mode: Face-to-Face
   - Format: Synchronous

Scenario #2: A single program with fully FTF and fully online options
   - Purpose: Description and purpose of program, including a statement indicating there are FTF and online options
   - Geographic Location: Type in “Delivered via technology”
   - Mode: Both (FTF and via technology)
   - Format: Mode of the online program (Asynchronous/Synchronous/Both)

Scenario #3: Multiple programs in a single plan – both FTF and DE delivery modes
   - Purpose: Description and purpose of both/all programs, including geographic location, format, and mode of delivery for each and an indication of which program the following item responses apply to
   - Geographic Location: Type in “Delivered via technology”
   - Mode: Via technology (>50% of the curriculum)
**Format:** Mode of the online program (Asynchronous/Synchronous/Both)

**Scenario #4: Program offered FTF at more than one geographic location (no DE option)**

- **Purpose:** Description and purpose of program, including all geographic location information
- **Geographic Location:** List location(s)
- **Mode:** Face-to-face
- **Format:** Synchronous

**Q:** What should be entered for “geographic location of delivery” if the program is only offered 100% online?

**A:** “Delivered via technology” is the recommended response.

**Q:** The program mission statement from the 19-20 assessment form is already populated in this text box. Can we just leave it as it is?

**A:** If the existing information addresses the overall purpose of the program it can be left as is. However, if the assessment plan is a combined plan (i.e., encompasses more than one program OR a program that is offered both face-to-face and fully online) then the location, format, and mode of delivery information should be added to the description (refer to the first FAQ in this section for more information.).
Program Learning Outcomes

All programs are expected to establish a minimum of three program learning outcomes (PLOs) as part of the program’s comprehensive Assessment Plan. However, **programs need only select and assess one PLO annually.** PLOs should represent the knowledge and skills students are expected to possess upon graduation. Feedback on PLOs will be based on the presence or absence of the criteria described below.

**Feedback Criteria**

1. **Outcome is clearly written, reflecting what students are expected to have learned upon completion of the program**

   To an external party reading the Assessment Plan it should be clear what knowledge and/or skills a graduate of the program is expected to possess. A strong PLO is written in clear, straightforward terms and is appropriate to the level of the degree offered.

2. **Outcome is measurable**

   Simple and specific PLOs are the most straightforward to measure. Consider the following:
   
   - Use of action verbs—such as those found in Bloom’s Taxonomy—to define specific expectations makes measurement of student achievement more concrete.
   - Compound and/or complex outcomes containing multiple skills are often difficult to fully capture, particularly if only one or two measures are used. PLOs focusing on a single skill are easier to measure comprehensively.
   - PLOs related to students’ beliefs and values are not directly measurable and should be avoided (e.g., *Students will develop a greater appreciation of a differing culture*).

3. **Outcome is mapped appropriately to university-level learning outcome(s)**

   In AEFIS, Program Coordinators are prompted to select Relevant Associations for each PLO in the Assessment Plan. There may be multiple sets of outcomes listed in the Relevant Associations dropdown menu, depending on the program level:

   **Undergraduate Programs**
   
   - Texas A&M University has identified seven [baccalaureate learning outcomes](#) which describe the knowledge and skills undergraduate should possess upon graduation from TAMU. These also apply to undergraduate certificates.
   - The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) established six [core objectives](#) or skills area designed to be introduced and reinforced throughout the Core Curriculum. All undergraduate degree programs are asked to map PLOs to these outcomes.
   - Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) has identified six learning outcomes (called [EmpowerU outcomes](#)) that apply to undergraduate degree programs and undergraduate-level certificates.
Graduate Programs

- Texas A&M University has identified several master’s and doctoral learning outcomes which describe the knowledge and skills graduate students should possess upon graduation from TAMU. Graduate-level certificate programs are also asked to map their PLOs to the master’s and/or doctoral learning outcomes.

FAQs

**Q:** The program has external accreditation requirements for the discipline which requires specific PLOs be assessed. Can we use those outcomes in this Assessment Plan?

**A:** Yes, in fact we encourage accredited programs to ensure close alignment between the annual program assessment process and program accreditation requirements.

**Q:** Do we have to measure the same outcomes every year? / Can we measure the same outcomes every year?

**A:** Program faculty should guide the assessment process, including determining which outcomes are measured and when. Some programs place their learning outcomes on two- or three-year rotations, focusing on just one or two PLOs in a given academic year. However, assessment planning should be an intentional process. In some cases, this might mean measuring the same PLOs every year, and in others this might mean measuring PLOs on a rotation. Even programs that assess their outcomes on a planned rotation might need to deviate from their rotation from time to time. Again, these decisions should be driven by faculty and the observations they make.

**Q:** Can this Assessment Plan include program objectives like participation in events, publication productivity, etc.?

**A:** The primary purpose of the assessment reporting process is to document student learning. Other objectives (e.g., tracking the number of manuscripts submitted by students) may be included as part of the Assessment Report as additional objectives; however, programs should ensure they are meeting the minimum expectation of reporting assessment results for one Program Learning Outcome annually, and that any programmatic objectives are in addition to PLO(s).

**Q:** For the associations with the university-level learning outcomes, is it better to indicate all that are somewhat associated or to be more selective?

**A:** The associations should be as closely aligned as possible; that is, any given PLO should only be associated with the university-level learning outcome(s) it most closely resembles. If two associations are closely related to the PLO, both may be selected. One purpose of the associations is to demonstrate how the program is assessing the university-wide outcomes through its annual assessment practices.

**Q:** If we plan to make significant changes to one of our outcomes, should we revise the existing outcome or add a new outcome in the assessment form?

**A:** If the revision is one that will fundamentally change how that outcome will be measured (e.g., changing a Communication outcome to a Critical Thinking outcome, or a Depth of Knowledge outcome that will focus on
a different content area), always add a new outcome instead of simply revising the existing Outcome tile. This ensures that the old version of the outcome remains intact and tied to its relevant measures in assessment forms from previous cycles. Add the new outcome and simply de-select the old outcome to indicate that it will not be assessed in the current cycle. These old outcomes can be permanently deleted later on.

Q: **We are adding a new outcome—what should we enter in the Outcome Code field in the assessment form?**

A: The Outcome Code should be a unique identifier no more than 20 characters long. All Outcome Codes should begin with the division code and unit code, separated by a dash, and end with characters that will make it easy to identify the focus of the outcome. For example, the Biology BS program might which to add a visual communication outcome, for which an appropriate outcome code might be “BS-BIOL-VCOMM”. Refer to the outcomes that were pre-loaded into the assessment forms at the start of the 18-19 cycle for the appropriate program codes.
Measures

A measure describes the methods of collecting and evaluating assessment data. A strong measure description makes the assessment strategy easy to follow for an external party who is not intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the program. The Measures section can be thought of as a miniature methods and data analyses section of a research paper—it is a description of methods used to gather and analyze assessment data.

For program learning outcomes (PLOs), there are two types of measures: direct and indirect.

**Direct measures** require students to demonstrate and display their competency or ability in some way that is evaluated for measurable quality by an expert such as faculty, assessment professionals, internship supervisors, or industry representatives. Some examples of direct measures include:

- Written assignments, oral presentations, portfolios, or demonstrations to which a rubric or other detailed criterion are applied
- Exam questions focused on a particular PLO
- Scores on standardized exams (e.g., licensure, certification, or subject area tests)
- Employer or internship supervisor ratings of student performance
- Other assignment grades based on detailed criteria

**Indirect measures** provide secondhand information about student learning. Whereas direct measures are concerned with the quality of student work as it relates to certain PLOs, indirect measures are indicators that students are probably learning. Often, indirect measures are too broad to represent the achievement of specific PLOs. Some examples of indirect measures include:

- Tasks tracked by recording completion or participation rates
- Completion of degree requirements
- Number of students who publish manuscripts or give conference presentations
- Survey questions students answer about their own perception of their abilities
- Job placement
- Course grades and some exam grades (see FAQs below)
- GPAs
- Course enrollment data

**All PLOs need at least one direct measure.** Indirect measures may supplement direct measures, but the focus of the Assessment Plan should be on the direct measurement of PLOs. Measures will be evaluated based on the presence or absence of the criteria described below.

**Feedback Criteria**

1. **Measure is a direct measure of student learning and clearly aligns with the outcome**

   A direct measure of student learning requires direct evaluation, meaning the quality of student work or the student’s demonstration of that specific skill should be observed and clearly reported. Programs should also ensure alignment between outcomes and their measures. For example, if the PLO states students will articulate certain discipline-specific concepts, the measure should describe a written or
oral activity through which students discuss those concepts (versus identifying the concepts on a multiple-choice exam, for example).

2. The data collection is clear (i.e., where the data are coming from)

The external reviewer of the Assessment Plan will not have an in-depth understanding of the program and its curriculum, so it is important to clearly communicate where data are coming from by including the following information, where appropriate: the course designation, the point in the curriculum when the data is collected, who collects the data, sampling and/or recruiting methods, etc.

3. Methodological processes are clear (i.e., how the data will be evaluated and reported)

This criterion is concerned with measurement and data analysis. The measure description should provide a clear picture of how the data are evaluated and reported, specifically for assessment of the program learning outcome. The program should address how the data collected through the assessment process are aggregated and analyzed for a program-level discussion about student learning.

4. All referenced rubrics/surveys are attached or sufficiently described

Programs should attach instruments used in the assessment process (i.e., rubrics, prompts, surveys, exam items, etc.) as supporting documentation in the Assessment Plan when feasible. Examples of instruments that programs are not expected to attach as supporting documents are standardized tests (such as certification exams or third-party assessment instruments) and qualifying/preliminary examination prompts.

FAQs

Q: Why aren’t course grades and GPAs considered direct measures?

A: Final course grades and GPAs are very broad metrics. PLOs are much more specific. Although a great deal of instruction in a particular course might focus on developing skills related to a PLO, the course likely addresses a variety of other skills and knowledge as well. It is difficult to determine how much of a course grade or GPA is actually due to how well students demonstrate a single, specific learning outcome. Furthermore, many course grades also take into account activities like class participation and attendance which further complicate how much a course grade actually captures a specific learning outcome.

Q: Why aren’t exam grades considered direct measures?

A: Similar to course grades (see above), comprehensive or multi-unit exam grades are often broad. However, some exams that are focused on specific topics and/or skills can make them candidates for use in direct assessment. When it comes to exam scores, program faculty should always consider which data would be more meaningful: a comprehensive exam grade or performance on specific exam items (e.g., essay questions or a grouping of multiple-choice items).
Q: Should we use more than one measure? Do we have to use more than one measure?

A: Consider this—you wouldn’t award a diploma based on a single exam grade. Relying on a single measure to capture collective student performance on a PLO will provide only limited information about the extent to which students are achieving that PLO. Programs are strongly encouraged to use more than one measure to assess student ability as this will provide a more complete picture of the curriculum and what student learning in the program entails. As a byproduct, use of multiple measures will facilitate conversations about continuous improvement.

Q: We received previous feedback about using a comprehensive rubric score as evidence of a PLO. Why is this a problem?

A: Aggregating rubric scores is not inherently a problem. Many multi-criteria rubrics exist, all of which might directly relate to the overall learning outcome (for example, AAC&U rubrics). However, depending on what the program wishes to accomplish it might be more useful to report the results for each rubric criterion separately. Breaking down the results like this can uncover gaps in learning that might not have been as obvious in the aggregate score alone. More granular results also make continuous improvement opportunities easier to identify. Additionally, some rubrics may include criteria for unrelated skills. For example, the rubric to evaluate a research paper might include criteria for the Literature Review, Methods, Analysis, and Discussion, but then also include a criterion for Grammar, Syntax, and Mechanics. If the PLO is specific to research skills, only scores from the research-related criteria should be reported.

Q: The measure description(s) from the 19-20 form is/are pre-loaded into the Data Collection text box in the Measures section of the 20-21 form. Nothing is entered in the Methodology text box. If our measurement strategy isn’t changing, can we just leave that text box blank?

A: No, something must be entered into both Measures text boxes (Data collection and Methodology or data analysis strategy). If methodology information is included in the measure description that was pre-loaded into the Data collection text box, please move that information into the Methodology text box. Please see Feedback Criteria #3 above for more information.

Q: Do the file names of the uploaded supporting documents matter?

A: The file name of a supporting document should be descriptive enough that it is clear to a reviewer how it relates to the measure to which it is connected. If supporting documents are sometimes revised year to-year, we suggest instituting a naming convention that includes the assessment cycle to which the document is relevant. Documents are carried forward into the new assessment forms every year (accessible from the ‘Manage Artifacts’ menu), so using this kind of naming convention will make it easier for new Program Coordinators to see the historical record of assessment-related documents.
Targets

A target is the level at which a program considers their program learning outcome (PLO) to be “met” or achieved on a given measure. Strong targets are clear, static levels of achievement. Targets will be evaluated based on the presence or absence of the criteria described below.

Feedback Criteria

1. The standard is clearly presented

“Standard” refers to the minimally acceptable student performance. For example, for a measure utilizing a 6-point rubric criterion, the standard might be that students earn at least 4 out of 6 points on the criterion. The standard should be meaningfully selected; it might be more or less rigorous depending on the degree level or on past student performance. Program faculty should collectively determine appropriate standards.

2. The proportion of students expected to meet the standard is clearly stated

The program should determine how many of their students are expected to meet the set standard. For particularly rigorous standards the proportion of students expected to meet the standard might be lower than for a more conservative standard. This proportion should be collectively determined by program faculty.

3. The target clearly aligns with the outcome and measure

The target(s) for a given measure should align with the measure description by using consistent language and format. In cases where a rubric is used, make sure the target statement specifically refers to the minimally acceptable performance level on the rubric. It also helps to refer back to the specific PLO being assessed. For example: 80% of students will earn ‘Accomplished’ or ‘Exemplary’ on the rubric criterion specific to written communication skills.

FAQs

Q: What are some examples of strong targets that include a specific proportion of students expected to meet the standard?

A: Here are some examples of strong targets:

- 85% of students will earn at least 7 out of 10 points on the critical thinking essay question.
- 100% of students will achieve the ‘Competent’ threshold on the Content Development rubric criterion.
- 70% of students will score above the 80th percentile on the ACS standardized exam.
Q: **How often, if at all, should targets be revised?**

A: Program faculty should revisit targets annually and revise them as necessary, particularly if the targets are met year after year. Targets that are consistently met year after year may also be a sign that other methods of measuring the outcome should be explored. It is considered good practice to rely on multiple measures for evidence of a particular outcome.

Q: **Do we have to justify our targets?**

A: Although not mandatory, including a brief description of the origins or rationale for each target will likely prove to be beneficial in the future when targets are being reviewed and/or when other individuals become involved in the assessment process.

Q: **We have more than one target for one of our measures—how should we indicate this in the assessment form?**

A: At the bottom of each Measure section in the assessment form there is an “+Add Target” button. Additional Target text boxes can be added using this feature. After receiving feedback from OIEE on the Assessment Plan, a Findings text box will appear under each individual target. However, it is up to the Program Coordinator whether separate Target sections are added or whether all targets are included in a single Target text box. If all are included in the same text box please be sure to address all targets in the Findings text box when reporting results.
Findings

Findings are the results from the analysis of assessment data. Strong Assessment Reports will consistently communicate findings in a clear manner that aligns with the language of the related measure and target. In addition to the finding statement itself, programs should select the appropriate designation (called a target status indicator)—whether the target was Met, Not Met, or Partially Met from the provided menu. Please see the FAQs section for information about the appropriate use of Partially Met.

If there are no findings to report for a given measure/target, programs may select one of the two other options in the target status indicator dropdown menu:\(^4\): (1) No students enrolled or (2) No data collected/reported. Appropriate use of each is briefly described here:

- **No students enrolled**: Select this option if there were no students enrolled in the program during the academic year for which the Report is being prepared.

- **No data collected/reported**: This option might be selected for a number of reasons. Most often it will be selected if there are fewer than 5 students enrolled in a given academic year, or if there are fewer than 5 students at the point in the curriculum where assessment data is collected. Programs are not required to report assessment results for fewer than 5 students. If this option is selected, it MUST be accompanied by a brief explanation. **Programs that experience consistently low enrollment should refer to the FAQs section for more information.**

Findings will be evaluated based on the presence or absence of the criteria described below.

**Feedback Criteria**

1. **Findings align with the measure and target as described**

   Language used in the finding statements should mirror the language used in the measure and target descriptions. The format in which the results are reported should clearly relate to the process(es) as outlined in the measure and target descriptions.

2. **Target status indicator is used appropriately**

   Target status indicators are used to indicate whether the target was Met, Not Met, or Partially Met. In addition to selecting target status indicators, the finding statement should support the selected indicator. If no findings are reported, either No students are enrolled or No data collected/reported should be selected (with an explanation accompanying the latter selection).

3. **Findings include a brief discussion regarding the meaning/value of results for purposes of continuous improvement**

\(^4\) Please note that these two options do not appear in the 19-20 Report forms. For the 19-20 Report, please use the Findings text box to communicate that no students are enrolled or why no data was collected/reported.
Finding statements should go beyond simply reporting results; they should also include an explanation and/or reflection about the practical significance of the results. This can be achieved by comparing the current findings to those of previous years, by discussing what was surprising or affirming about the results, or by further drilling down into the data to discover more granular information.

4. Where appropriate, findings are disaggregated (i.e., by program, by mode of delivery, by geographic location)

Provided here are some examples of Assessment Reports in which results should be disaggregated:

- The Assessment Plan includes two programs with different credentials (e.g., MS/PhD or MS/MEd combined in a single Plan)
- The Assessment Plan includes two or more programs with different modes of delivery (e.g., a Distance Education program in the same Plan as a face-to-face program)
- The Assessment Plan includes a single program, but that program is offered both face-to-face and via technology OR face-to-face in two different geographic locations

Programs falling into any of the three categories listed above (or any combination of the above) are required to disaggregate assessment results by these characteristics.

FAQs

Q: What does ‘Partially Met’ mean and when should it be used?

A: Partially Met should be used only when reporting findings for compound/complex targets. For example: A program uses a four-criteria, four-point rating scale rubric to measure written communication. The target states that 80% of the students will achieve a score of ‘3’ or higher on all criteria of the rubric. The results show that 83% of students achieved ‘3’ or better on two of the criteria, but only 75% achieved a ‘3’ or better on the other two criteria. This Target would be Partially Met. Partially Met should not be used if the target was only close to being met.

Q: There is consistently low enrollment in the program—can we always select ‘No data collected/reported’ if there are fewer than 5 students on which to report assessment results?

A: No. Only programs that occasionally experience low enrollment or only occasionally assess fewer than 5 students should select this option. Programs with consistently low enrollment must utilize other methods of reporting results. We recommend combining current assessment results with assessment results from the past two or three cycles in which the same measures were used. This creates a larger sample and results in more data on which to base continuous improvement efforts.

Q: All of the targets are met. If we just say “This is an indication that our students are performing well” will the program meet the criteria of discussing the meaning/value of results for purposes of continuous improvement?
A: Saying the findings are an indication that students are performing well is essentially the same as indicating the target is Met. The finding statement should go one step further by contextualizing the results. This can be done in multiple ways (see Feedback Criterion #3), but one of the most powerful ways to discuss the meaning of results for purposes of continuous improvement is to describe the longitudinal trend. How have students performed on this outcome/measure over the past few assessment cycles? Is progress being made? If not, to what might faculty attribute this trend?

Q: **How should finding statements be structured?**

A: There is not a prescribed template all finding statements must follow. However, the following is a template programs might find useful:

- **First sentence:** Present the assessment results in the context of the measure (e.g., *85% of students achieved at least 3 points on the ‘Written Communication’ rubric criterion*).
- **Second sentence:** Reiterate the target, stating whether it was met, not met, or partially met (e.g., *The target of 80% achieving at least a 3 was met*).
- **Third sentence:** Contextualize the results by discussing longitudinal data trends, presenting other supporting data (if available), and/or by reflecting on whether results were surprising or affirming and why.

Q: **What kind of supporting documentation should be uploaded and linked to the Findings section(s)?**

A: Supporting documentation in the Findings section is optional. Some programs may find it useful to upload documents that further illustrate their findings (reports, charts and graphs, raw data, etc.), as AEFIS then becomes a central location for that information from year-to-year. Please ensure uploaded documents do not include any identifying student information.
Data-Informed Actions

Data-informed actions are the actions the program intends to take in response to the assessment results. These actions should have a close, clear connection to the data collected during the assessment reporting cycle. Every program is expected to submit at least one data-informed action that fulfills the criteria below. In addition, programs are expected to address use of results for each individual finding statement. See FAQs section for additional information.

Feedback Criteria

1. Course of action is designed to improve/strengthen student learning

Data-informed actions should clearly articulate a specific course of action designed to improve future assessment results for a targeted PLO. There should be enough detail included that an external reviewer is able to understand what specific changes are being made to affect positive change in achievement of a specific PLO. See FAQs for examples of appropriate actions/curricular changes to improve PLO results.

2. Action includes specific implementation details (e.g., timeline, responsible party, etc.)

Including a timeline and identifying the responsible party demonstrates the action has been carefully considered and implementation has been discussed amongst program faculty. Consider including an estimate of when the impact of the action might first be observed in assessment results.

3. Action description addresses why the program believes the action will lead to improvements in learning

Data-informed actions should identify how and/or why the program believes the action will improve student learning. This might be a description of how the action will directly affect students, how the action addresses identified deficiencies contributing to current assessment results, or why faculty believe this action will help improve the program and the PLO results overall.

FAQs

Q: Do we have to enter a data-informed action for every finding?

A: Text responses are required in all data-informed action text boxes, meaning the program should have a response to all of the reported findings. If the program establishes a data-informed action for only one finding, responses to the other findings might be less involved. Here are a few examples: (1) the program will continue monitoring student achievement on the PLO; (2) the program will continue collecting data for X number of cycles in an effort to identify a specific trend in the data; (3) the program will continue to gather data until there is sufficient data for analysis. Remember, at least one response needs to outline a specific curricular action.
Q: How specific does a data-informed action need to be?

A: The development of a data-informed action should be a collaborative decision-making process involving program faculty. It should reflect a specific, systematic response to the findings. This does not mean the action must be a large, resource-demanding overhaul to the program/curriculum. Rather, the action should be specific, identifiable, and should be able to be implemented in a systematic and intentional way. Listing possible curricular changes without committing to a specific action does not demonstrate a clear and intentional use of assessment data for improvement.

Examples include, but are not limited to:
- A course-level adjustment at any point in the curriculum
- New text, assignments, etc.
- Guest lecturer in a specific course
- New programming or activities designed to enhance and improve PLO results
- A pilot program
- Prerequisite or other curriculum-based adjustment
- Changes to assignment requirements
- Changes to meeting requirements
- Changes to advising strategies
- Additional required trainings for faculty, staff, or students

Q: Can a data-informed action focus on a change to the program’s assessment strategies?

A: It is expected that at least one data-informed action is a curricular change designed to improve student learning. Changes to assessment strategies and/or to the overall assessment process do not fit this criterion.

Q: How do we write a data-informed action when all of the targets are met?

A: Met targets are a sign the program is functioning well and the established PLOs are achievable. However, it does not mean that all of the work is done and there is no further need for assessment or attention to continuous improvement. Therefore, the program should still consider how the collected data can inform continuous improvement efforts. Strategies for continuous improvement based on met targets include, but are not limited to:
- Drilling down into the results further, perhaps by demographics, course section, or some other dimension in an effort to identify possible gaps or disparities
- Adjusting the target
  - If the program follows this strategy it is critical to include a discussion of what action the program will take in order to help students meet the new target. This keeps the focus of the data-informed action on a curricular change rather than simply on updating the target.
Status Update & Distance Education Report

This separate report—formerly called Assessment Reflections & Closing the Loop—includes the following prompts:

**Program Leadership & Faculty Involvement**

1. How are program leadership and faculty involved in the sense-making of assessment data and decisions regarding continuous improvement efforts?

**Status Update on a Previously Identified Action**

1. Provide an update on a curricular change or content-based action from a previous program assessment report.
2. What changes, if any, have occurred in PLO achievement since the action was taken?

**Distance Education Program Effectiveness** (These prompts ONLY appear in forms assigned to DE programs)

1. How was the DE program delivered during academic year 2020-2021? (*Synchronously, Asynchronously, Both*)
2. **Data Sources:** During AY20-21, what data were used to explicitly examine the effectiveness of the distance education program given its unique mode of delivery?
3. **Findings:** What are the specific findings (quantitative or qualitative) derived from the data sources described above?
4. **Implications:** Do the findings demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the program given its unique mode of delivery? If not, what actions are being taken to improve the overall effectiveness of the program?

For more information, visit the [DE Program Effectiveness resource page](#).

**Feedback Criteria**

1. *The role of faculty and program leadership in assessment is sufficiently described*

Program assessment should be a faculty-owned and faculty-driven process. Individuals who hold leadership positions in the program/department should also be involved in some capacity. Responses should include a description of the role of the program’s faculty and leadership throughout the assessment process with particular emphasis on the analysis of results and continuous improvement decision-making. To guide the response, consider the following questions: *At what stage(s) of the assessment process were faculty and program leadership involved? In what capacity? What role did they play in data sense-making and in the decision-making processes related to continuous improvement and future assessment?*
2. **Status update on a previously identified action is provided**

   Provide a summary of the previously identified action. Describe the specific action that was taken, which Assessment Report it was from (including the assessment findings that prompted it), and which PLO(s) it was intended to improve.

3. **Action is content-based/curricular in nature (i.e., not a change to the assessment process)**

   The focus of the assessment process is on student learning, so the update provided here should be on a learning-centered action. It is expected that a program’s assessment strategies will change over time as the program develops and evolves, but those changes are reflected in the Assessment Plan each year and thus should not be updated here. The Status Update section specifically focuses on curricular changes that have been made (or are currently being implemented).

4. **Discusses the impact of the action to date**

   Consider the impact the action may have had on the PLO results. Whether results were improved or not improved, reflect on what role the action may have played and discuss how the program aims to further improve outcome achievement in the future.

   When possible, clearly state the specific results of the subsequent PLO assessment and how these results compare to the previous findings (i.e., the specific findings which prompted the action in the first place). Avoid vague statements such as “the target wasn’t met in the previous report.” Be as specific as possible: *In the AY19-20 Report only 70% of students scored Acceptable on the rubric, but after implementing the action and re-assessing the outcome we found that the percentage of students scoring Acceptable or higher increased to 78%.*

There are not specific feedback criteria for the DE responses, but DE program coordinators should refer to the [DE Program Effectiveness resource page](#) for guidance and FAQs.

**FAQs**

**Q:** *What if there was no improvement in the targeted PLO(s)?*

**A:** The purpose of this process is to engage in and provide evidence of seeking improvement. There are no repercussions for unmet targets or unimproved assessment findings. In cases where improvement was not observed, this is valuable information in and of itself. Reflect on what might be done differently in the future to guide improvement.

**Q:** *What if we don’t have any follow-up results yet?*

**A:** As noted above, if an action has not yet been fully implemented (and if there are no other fully implemented actions on which to provide a status update), describe in detail where the program is in the implementation process and when program faculty expect to be able to re-assess the targeted PLO(s).
Q: **What should we write in the Status Update section if our program is brand new?**

A: If the program is brand new as of the current reporting cycle there won’t be a previous action on which to provide an update, so the Program Coordinator can simply state this in the text box. Brand new programs are also not required to report findings or use of results.

Q: **The program is using different measures than before, so the pre- and post-action data aren’t directly comparable. Is this an issue?**

A: No, this is not an issue. Assessment is not a hard science, so it is not necessary for the methodology to stay the same throughout the process. Assessment itself is a process, so it makes sense for measures to change as the program evolves. The program’s reflection on the efforts made to improve student learning is more important than ensuring directly comparable assessment results.

Q: **What if none of the program’s previous actions were curricular in nature/none were designed to improve PLOs?**

A: As this documentation is specific to *program learning outcome* assessment, the action discussed in the Status Update section should be curricular in nature (and specifically related to a PLO). If none of the program’s previous actions (i.e., actions submitted in previous Assessment Reports) were curricular in nature, the program should instead discuss some other curricular change made over the last few years.
## 2020-2021 Academic Program Assessment Workflow

*(Updated March 17, 2021)*

### 2020 (Plan) vs 2021 (Report)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2021 (Report)</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Deadline:</strong> October 22, 2021</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Deadline:</strong> November 12, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deadline:</strong> TBD</td>
<td><strong>Deadline:</strong> December 17, 2021</td>
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### Additional Dates & Deadlines:

*20-21 Status Update & DE Report (formerly Assessment Reflections & Closing the Loop)*

- Forms available in Action Items: **October 25, 2021**
- Due to OIEE: **December 3, 2021**
- OIEE feedback by: **January 31, 2022**