ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

Updated January 2025

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Office of Institutional Effectiveness
& Evaluation

Abbreviations & Definitions

APR	Academic Program Review
CLO	Course Learning Outcome
DE	Distance Education
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
OIEE	Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation
PLO	Program Learning Outcome
ULO	University Learning Outcome

Table of Contents

Introduction to Academic Program Assessment

Purpose

The purpose of academic program assessment is for program 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 quality improvement process.

Components

The **Assessment Plan**, completed every 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 each year, but **at least one PLO must be assessed annually**. The Assessment Plan consists of the following:

- Program Description
- Program Learning Outcome(s)
- Measures & Targets

The **Assessment Report**, completed every Fall semester, includes assessment findings from the data gathered over the course of the *previous* academic year, as outlined in the established Assessment Plan for that year. The Assessment Report also includes the program's intended use of results, formerly called "Data-Informed Actions." In the Use of Results section, the program describes the action(s) program faculty will implement to improve PLOs. A minimum of one (1) content-based action (i.e., curricular change) designed to improve one or more of the assessed PLOs is required each year.

Finally, the Assessment Report includes a status update of an action identified in a previous assessment report, a process formerly referred to as "Closing the Loop." The Assessment Report consists of the following:

- Findings
- Use of Results
- Status Update of a Previously Identified Action

Roles

Over the course of the two-year assessment cycle (see page 4), assessment forms follow an 8-step workflow. Individuals in the following roles participate at one or various points in the cycle:

- **Program Coordinators**: Faculty/instructors responsible for documenting and submitting Assessment Plans and Reports in HelioCampus (formerly AEFIS)
- **Assessment Liaisons**: College, school, or campus appointees who work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation (OIEE) to provide support and communicate expectations to Program Coordinators in their respective college, school, or campus; responsible for providing internal feedback on Assessment Plans and Reports
- **Final Approvers**: Individuals (most often Department Heads and/or Associate Department Heads) who provide the final review of the Assessment Report before submitting it to OIEE for end-of-cycle comments
- **OIEE**: The University's administrative office responsible for providing support to those in the roles defined above as they participate in the annual program assessment process; responsible for managing the assessment platform (HelioCampus) and publishing resources for users, as well as providing final comments on completed Assessment Reports

How to Use the Guidelines Manual

The components making up the Plan and Report are covered individually and in detail throughout this manual. The walkthrough sections of this companion manual follow the same order of the sections comprising the Assessment Plan and Assessment Report.

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 this process, highlight best practices, and facilitate self- and peer-review of Assessment Plans and Assessment Reports.

Each section of this manual includes:

- A description of the assessment component
- Criteria for what each component should include and on which internal liaisons provide feedback
- Examples
- Frequently asked questions
- Screenshots of what the components look like in HelioCampus

 Please pay particular attention to the **callouts** with the red exclamation mark image on the left. These callouts mark important information.

 Each section of this companion manual includes an FAQ section. The FAQs in **blue text** indicate information that addresses functionality within HelioCampus. The HelioCampus logo on the left indicates a callout for important technical information about the online platform.

Academic Program Assessment Due Dates

Specific due dates for active Program Assessment cycles can be found on the OIEE website (https://assessment.tamu.edu). See the example below, which shows a table of 2023-24 due dates for each workflow step. Generally, the timing of due dates is the same each year. That means you can expect for Plan (Step 1) to be due the first week of April each year, and the first draft of the Report (Step 3) to be due in mid- to late October.

Example: AY2023-24 Due Dates

Workflow Step	Step Name (In HelioCampus)	Assigned Role	Submission Due Date*
Step 1	Enter Plan	Program Coordinator	April 7, 2023
Step 2	Internal Feedback on Plan	Assessment Liaison	May 19, 2023
Step 3	Draft Report	Program Coordinator	October 18, 2024
Step 4	Internal Feedback on Report	Assessment Liaison	November 15, 2024
Step 5	Revise/Finalize Report	Program Coordinator	December 6, 2024
Step 6	Final Approval of Report	Final Approver (Dept)	December 20, 2024
Step 7	OIEE Comments	OIEE	January 31, 2025
Step 8	Acknowledge Final Comments	Program Coordinator	February 7, 2025

*The submission due date denotes when the form needs to be submitted to the *next* workflow step. For example, for the 2023-24 cycle, the due date to submit forms at Step 3 to Step 4 is October 18, 2024.

Using HelioCampus to Document Academic Program Assessment

Getting Started

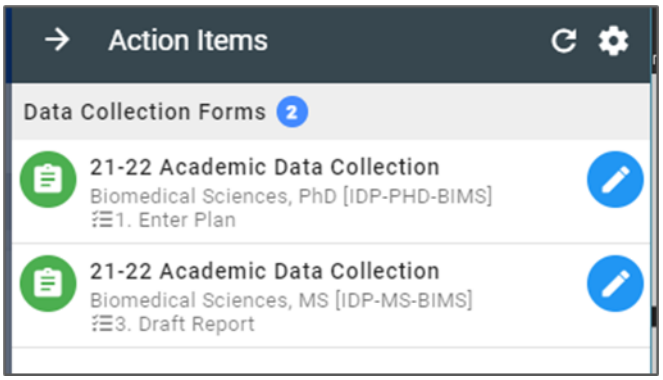
Faculty and staff who are responsible for the submission of Assessment Plans & Reports are called **Program Coordinators** in HelioCampus (formerly AEFIS). Program Coordinators use their NetID and password to log in to HelioCampus (tamu.aefis.net).

New users can request access via the form found here.

Newly appointed Program Coordinators should refer to the HelioCampus User Guide for specific instructions on logging in, accessing, and submitting Assessment Plans. This visual guide includes helpful tips, things to remember, and information about system features that Program Coordinators may find useful. The following information covers the basics of using HelioCampus for program assessment.

Accessing 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 HelioCampus. 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 in the blue bar pictured below.

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

Upon opening an assessment form in a new cycle for the first time, Program Coordinators will find information is already entered in some fields. The following information has been pre-populated in the new form from the previous year's form for each program:

- In the Program Description section, the "Discipline-specific purpose and focus" text
- In the Program Description section, the campus/approved location and distance education text
- All Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)
- All Measures and Targets that were entered under selected PLOs in the assessment form from the previous cycle

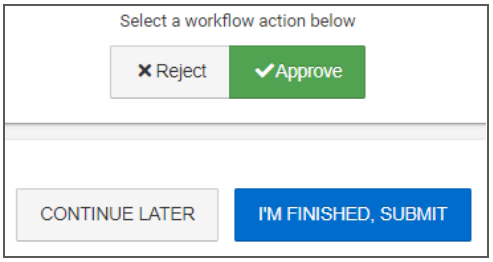
New programs will only see the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that were entered into the Curricular Approval Request System (CARS) in their assessment forms. No other information will be pre-populated.

Submitting Assessment Forms

Over the course of the assessment cycle, Program Coordinators will submit the Assessment Plan one time (Step 1) and the Assessment Report twice (Steps 3 and 5). See the Appendix for a visual representation of the assessment cycle.

Upon submitting the Plan, it will be sent to the Assessment Liaison for feedback. Simply click the "Submit the Form" button at the bottom of the form.

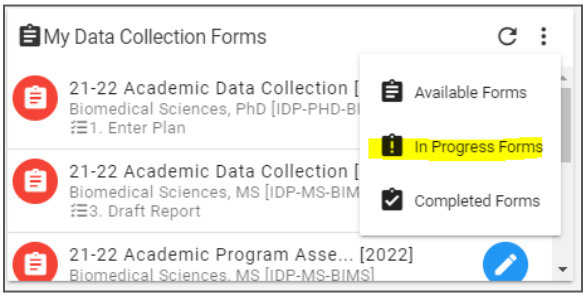
An additional step is required for all submissions *after* the initial submission. There will be two additional buttons above the "Submit the Form" button: "Approve" and "Reject." **To successfully submit the form, "Approve" must be selected first.** This button indicates the form should move to the *next step* in the workflow. The "Reject" button indicates the form should move *back a step* in the workflow. Program Coordinators will likely not use the "Reject" button very often, if at all.



After receiving feedback on the Assessment Plan from the internal Assessment Liaison (i.e., when the form is at Step 3), 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 after the Assessment Report (Findings and Use of Results) information is entered, which won't be until the Fall semester of the NEXT year.** 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 academic year as assessment data is gathered.

How to Locate Assessment Forms Not Showing on Your Action Items



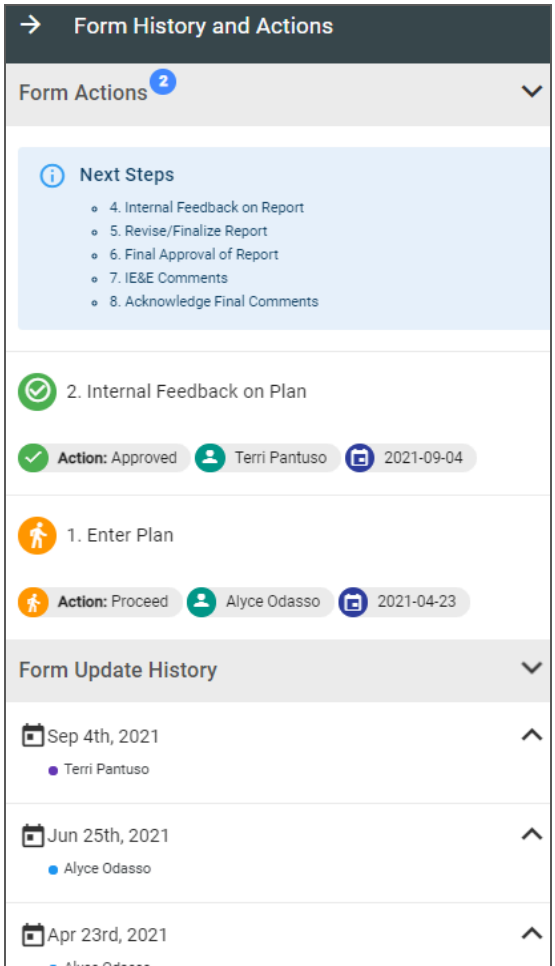
After the Program Coordinator submits a form, it will no longer appear on their Action Items list. However, Program Coordinators can view read-only copies of submitted forms from their HelioCampus dashboard widget labeled "My Data Collection Forms." Simply click the three-dot icon at the top right of the widget and filter by "In Progress Forms."

Completed assessment forms from previous cycles (e.g., AY 21-22, AY 20-21) can also be accessed from this widget. Simply select "Completed Forms." These will be useful to review when responding to the Status Update items in Step 3.

Form History 

HelioCampus tracks the changes made within assessment forms and submission history. While in a form, you can review this information by clicking the clock icon at the top right of the form (pictured above). The resulting menu has two sections:

- **Form Actions.** This section shows the assessment form's submission history including date, time, whether the form was sent forward in the workflow (Action: Proceed or Action: Approve) or backward (Action: Rejected), and by whom.
- **Form Update History.** This section shows a list of dated sessions in which a Program Coordinator, Liaison, Final Approver, or OIEE staff member



was making edits to the form. Each session is date-stamped and labeled with the user's name.

Expand a session by clicking the caret (^). This view will show each individual change that was made in the form (timestamped). Clicking on an individual change/update will automatically navigate you to that section of the form.

This is a particularly useful feature if more than one Program Coordinator is responsible for entering information in the assessment form. It provides a total history of what has been entered, when, and by whom.

Email Notifications

When feedback is submitted 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. The sender of these notifications is listed as "The Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation," but the notifications are sent automatically by HelioCampus. **Please read these email notifications carefully as they provide important information, such as who provided feedback, next steps and future due dates, and technical information about HelioCampus.**

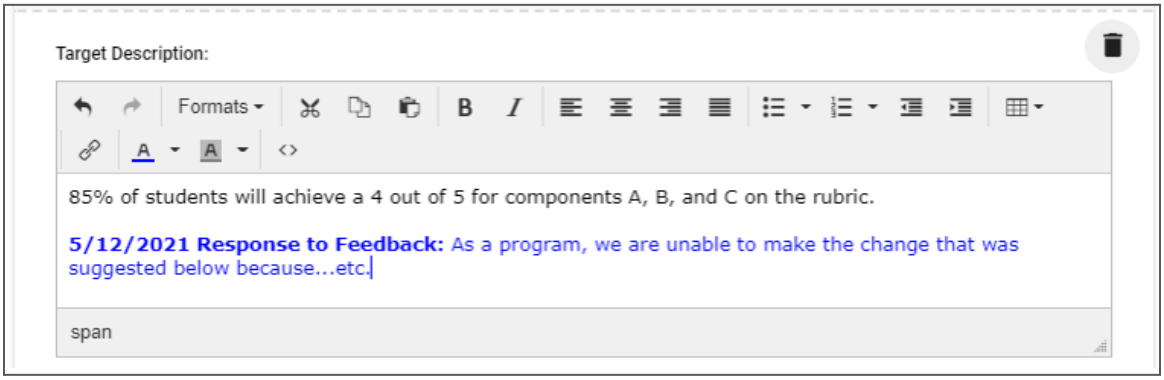
 If you have a student (@email.tamu.edu) and a work (@tamu.edu) email address, you may need to forward these notifications from your student account to your work account. HelioCampus receives a nightly update from the University's Student Information System during which student email addresses overwrite work email addresses. If you do not believe you are receiving notifications, please check your student email account and set up the forwarding function.

Responding to Feedback

Internal Liaisons provide feedback on Assessment Plans and Reports twice over the course of the cycle (Steps 2 & 4). Beyond making revisions or updates to the Plan/Report as desired, Program Coordinators are **not** required to directly respond to Liaison feedback. However, there may be some cases in which the Program Coordinator wishes to respond to the feedback (e.g., perhaps because the recommended revision cannot be made, and the Program Coordinator wishes to provide an explanation).

To respond to the feedback provided in your form, simply type your response in the text box that includes the content on which the feedback was provided. That is, if the Liaison provided feedback on a Target, type your response in the Target text box. OIEE recommends *dating* your response, as well as

making the text a *different color* so that it stands out from the other content in the text box. See below for an example:



Program Description

The Program Description section does not have specific "Yes/No" criteria on which Liaisons provide feedback. Only qualitative feedback is provided.

In this first section of the Assessment Plan, Program Coordinators are asked to provide some general information about the program(s). The Program Description section includes three prompts/items:

1. ***Discipline-specific purpose and focus of the program(s)***

Describe the purpose and focus of the academic program (i.e., what students with this degree will be prepared to do after graduation with the knowledge and skills gained in the program). This may resemble the program's mission statement and/or catalog description.

2. ***Campus/approved location of delivery and/or delivery through distance education technology***

The **physical geographic location** of program delivery should be clearly stated for all programs included in the Assessment Plan. This refers to the campus (College Station, Galveston, Qatar) and/or the approved teaching site (e.g., City Centre in Houston, HSC in Bryan, Dallas, McAllen, etc.). If the program is available at multiple locations, please include each site separated by a comma or semicolon.

If the program is available through **distance education (DE) technology**, this should be noted and the format of delivery should also be clearly stated (i.e., asynchronous, synchronous, or both).

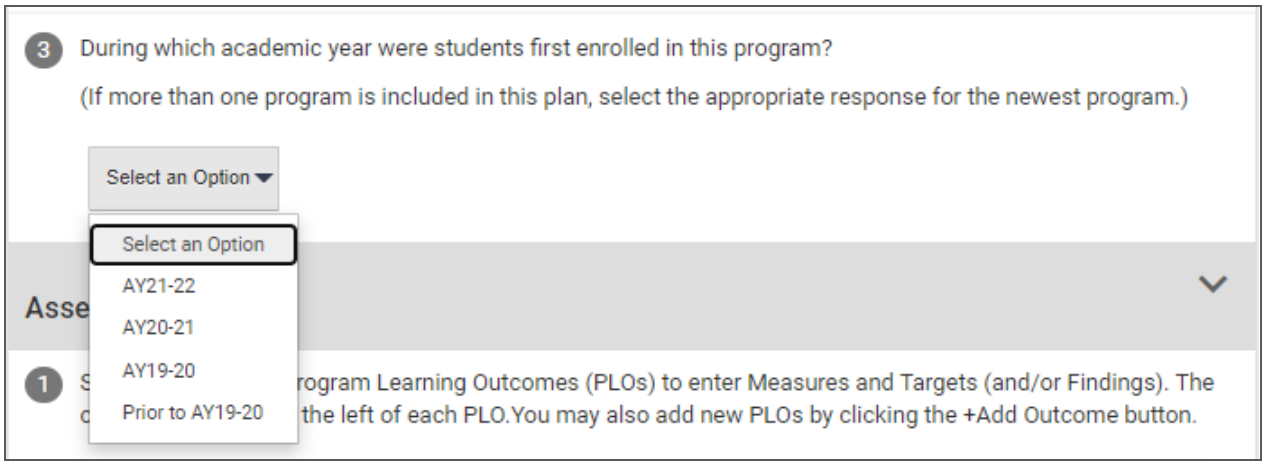
- ***Program offered through DE technology***: More than half or all the coursework (>50%) is available to students through asynchronous web-based delivery and/or through synchronous delivery where content is delivered real-time, but the instructor and student(s) are in different geographic locations.
- ***Asynchronous delivery****:* Majority of instruction *does not* occur in real time. Instructors provide content which the student can access via technology on their own time.
- ***Synchronous delivery****:* Majority of instruction is available to and accessed by students in real time with the instructor via technology.
- ***Both****:* Program offers 50% or more of the credit hours *synchronously* via technology <u>AND</u> 50% or more of the credit hours *asynchronously* via technology.

 Programs that are offered in both modalities (i.e., fully online <u>and</u> fully face-to-face) should clearly indicate this in the appropriate text box.

3. *During which academic year were students first enrolled in this program?*

Programs are prompted to select from a dropdown menu the first academic year during which students were enrolled in the program. This helps assessment staff determine expectations for reporting. For example, new four- or five-year programs are expected to submit a Plan but may not yet have data for the Report. Conversely, programs that have enrolled students for several years are expected to report assessment results annually.

Assessment Plans that include more than one program should select the option that describes the *newest* program.



Program Description FAQs

Q: The discipline-specific purpose from last year's assessment form is already populated in the text box. Can we just leave it as it is?

A: If the existing information addresses the overall purpose of the program(s) it can be left as is. Ensure all location/DE information is in the appropriate text box. If that information is missing from the existing description, it should be added in the appropriate text box. If the Assessment Plan covers more than one program, double check that the program purpose AND location/DE information is communicated for all programs.

Program Learning Outcomes

A **program learning outcome (PLO)** is a skill or competency students are expected to demonstrate or articulate by the time they graduate from the academic program and/or complete the requirements for a certificate. See the screenshot below for an example of a PLO entered in HelioCampus.

All degree programs and certificates are expected to establish a minimum of three PLOs to assess within the program's comprehensive Assessment Plan. These PLOs may be assessed on rotation, but it is recommended to assess at least three PLOs in a five-year period. Programs are expected to meet the **minimum requirement** of assessing at least **one PLO per cycle**.

Every ten years, the University requires academic departments to participate in an **Academic Program Review (APR)** and complete a self-study. Departmental programs reviewed by external accrediting bodies are not part of the formal APR process. Programs should be prepared to include 2-3 of their most recent Assessment Reports in their department's self-study, so it is advisable to assess more than one PLO in a three-year period.

Criteria

1. *PLO is learning-centered and is written at the program level (not course level).*

PLO descriptions should clearly state the specific knowledge and skills *graduates of the program* are expected to possess. A strong PLO is written in clear, straightforward terms and is appropriate to the degree (or certificate) level. Whereas course learning outcomes (CLOs) describe knowledge and abilities students should possess at the end of a course, PLOs describe the broader knowledge and abilities students should be able to demonstrate through their combined coursework. *See the relevant FAQ for an example of how a learning outcome might differ between levels.*

2. *PLO is mapped appropriately to Relevant Association(s).*

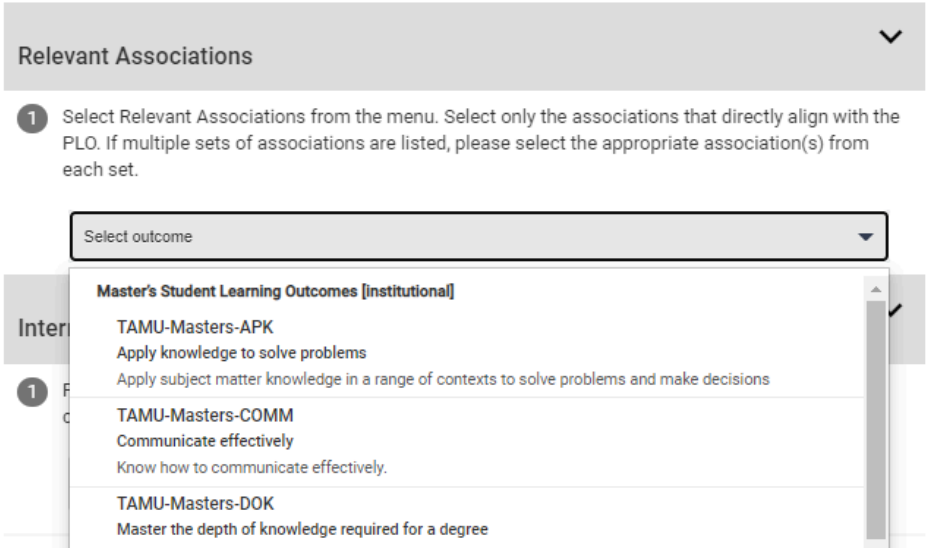
Program Coordinators are prompted to select Relevant Associations for each PLO in the Assessment Plan. There may be multiple sets of outcomes listed in the Relevant Associations dropdown menu, depending on the program level:

Relevant Associations for Undergraduate Programs (select from *each* category, if applicable)

- Baccalaureate student learning outcomes - Texas A&M University has identified seven learning outcomes which describe the knowledge and skills undergraduate students should possess upon graduation from TAMU. These also apply to UG certificates.
- Core Curriculum objectives - The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has established six skills which prepare students for the job market and their role in a diverse world and democratic society. These skills are introduced and reinforced throughout the Core Curriculum. All undergraduate degree programs are asked to map PLOs to these outcomes if relevant.
- *EmpowerU* outcomes - Texas A&M University System has identified six learning outcomes that apply to UG degree programs and UG certificates.

Relevant Associations for Graduate Programs

- Master's and doctoral learning outcomes – Texas A&M University has identified several 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.



PLO FAQs

Q: Our program is externally accredited, and we are required to assess specific outcomes. Can we put those outcomes in this Assessment Plan?

A: Yes, we encourage accredited programs to ensure close alignment between the annual program assessment process and program accreditation requirements. Additionally, programs may wish to set up their Assessment Plan based on the results of the program's Academic Program Review (APR) if they received feedback related to learning outcomes.

Q: Do we have to measure the same PLOs every year? Can we measure the same PLOs every year?

A: Program faculty should guide the assessment process, including determining which PLOs are measured and when. Some programs place their PLOs on two- or three-year rotations, focusing on just one or two in a given academic year. In any case, assessment planning should be an *intentional* process. For some programs this might mean measuring the same PLOs every year, and in others this might mean measuring them on a rotation. Even programs that assess their PLOs 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. *Please also see the PLO information on page 12.*

Q: Can the Assessment Plan include program objectives like participation in educational activities, publication productivity, etc.?

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

Q: What is the difference between course, program, and university learning outcomes?

A: University learning outcomes (ULOs) are very broad; they are worded in such a way that they could apply to any academic program. Program learning outcomes (PLOs) include discipline-specific details that set them apart from broad ULOs, but they are not so specific that only one course in the curriculum addresses the skill or content. Course learning outcomes are very specific, perhaps using language that relates to a particular course assignment or specific activity listed on a course syllabus. Here is an example of a knowledge application outcome at the three different levels:

ULO: Students will apply discipline knowledge in a range of contexts to solve problems, make decisions, and/or reach conclusions.

PLO: Students will apply the principles of child development in observational contexts and when presented with case-study scenarios.

CLO: Students will apply the principles of child development to various toys available on the market.

Q: Regarding the selection of Relevant Associations, is it better to select all that are somewhat associated or to only select the most closely related ones?

A: The associations should be as closely aligned as possible. That is, each PLO should only be associated with the Relevant Association(s) it most closely resembles. If two associations are closely related to the PLO, both may be selected. One purpose of making these associations is to demonstrate how the program is addressing the university- and/or system-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.* This ensures 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 outdated outcomes can be permanently deleted later.

Q: Can I deselect an outcome (i.e., un-check the checkbox) after I've finished entering all the information for it?

A: PLOs must be selected to be included in the submission. If a PLO is left unselected at the time of submission, it will not move forward with the next workflow step. You will still see the unselected PLOs when the form comes back to you. If you want to de-select an outcome to minimize the information and make form navigation easier, there is a better solution. Clicking the caret symbol (^) next to the PLO checkbox will minimize the PLO while keeping it selected.

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 degree and four-letter program 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 wish to add a visual communication outcome, for which an appropriate outcome code might be "BS-BIOL-VCOMM." Refer to the existing outcomes in the form for the appropriate coding structure.

Measures & Targets

A **measure** describes the methods of collecting and evaluating assessment data. A strong measure description makes the assessment strategy easy for internal stakeholders to replicate and easy to understand by 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 section of a research paper.

A **target** is the level at which a program considers their program learning outcome (PLO) to be "met" or achieved on a given measure. A strong target statement communicates a clear level of achievement.

Types of Measures

There are two types of measures: *direct* and *indirect*. **PLOs must be assessed with at least one direct measure.** Indirect measures may supplement direct measures, but the focus of the Assessment Plan should be on direct measurement of PLOs. Measures can be either quantitative or qualitative.

Direct measures require students to demonstrate their competency or ability in a way that is evaluated for *measurable quality* by an expert, such as an instructor, assessment professional, internship supervisor, or industry representative. Some examples of direct measures are:

- Written assignments, oral presentations, portfolios, or demonstrations to which a rubric—or other detailed criteria—are applied
- Exam questions written to evaluate a specific PLO or content area
- Scores on standardized exams (e.g., licensure, certification, or subject area tests)
- Employer, internship supervisor, or committee chair evaluations of student performance
- Competency interviews
- Evaluations of student teaching and classroom observation
- Other assignment grades based on defined 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 depict achievement of specific PLOs. Some examples of indirect measures are:

- Survey questions students answer about their own perception of their abilities
- Tasks tracked by recording completion or participation rates
- Completion of degree requirements
- Number of students who publish manuscripts or give conference presentations

- Job placement data
- Focus groups
- Course grades and some comprehensive exam grades (see FAQs below)
- GPAs
- Course enrollment data

Criteria

1. *The measure aligns with the PLO as defined.*

Programs should ensure alignment between PLOs and their measures. For example, if the PLO states students will *articulate* a discipline-specific concept, the measure should describe a written or oral activity through which students define and explain that concept (versus *identifying* the concepts on a multiple-choice exam, for example).

2. *Both (1) data collection, and (2) the program's plan for aggregation/analysis of data at the program level are clear.*

It is important to clearly communicate *where* data are coming from by including the following information, as relevant: The course designation and/or point in the curriculum when the data is collected, who collects the data (not necessarily by name), sampling methods, etc. Enough detail should be provided to clarify how the measure addresses the PLO as it is defined.

The measure description should also include information about how the data will be *aggregated* and *analyzed* to be meaningful at the program level. Many programs utilize measures that are embedded within courses to collect information about how students are achieving outcomes. Because this process is centered on program assessment (as opposed to course assessment), the Program Coordinator should include an explanation of how the data from individual students will be aggregated and subsequently analyzed in order to be meaningful for a *program-level* discussion about student learning and achievement.

 If the program is offered via different modes of delivery (e.g., FTF/online), at different locations (e.g., College Station campus/McAllen campus), or if there are multiple credentials included in the same assessment plan (e.g., MS/PhD), be sure to state how the future assessment results will be disaggregated to capture learning in each of these unique conditions. If measures will differ across these conditions, describe each measurement strategy that will be used.

3. Target is clear and specific

Strong targets have the following characteristics: (1) Alignment with the measure and PLO in terms of language and specificity, (2) the minimally acceptable performance on the measure is identified, and (3) the proportion of students who are expected to reach that performance level is identified.

For example:

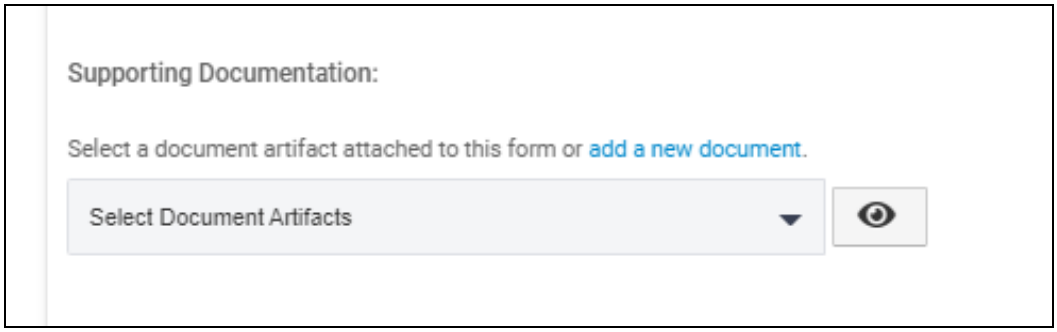
- The **PLO** is about synthesizing information from different sources.
- The **measure** is a rubric applied to a research paper. The rubric has the following categories: Introduction of Topic, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Implications. Each of the rubric categories is defined at the following performance levels: Exemplary, Accomplished, Developing, Beginner. The Literature Review category specifically includes consideration of the level at which students synthesize information from different sources.
- An appropriate **target** might be as follows: *80% of students will be rated as either Accomplished or Exemplary on the Literature Review category of the rubric.*

Notice that the target (1) refers to the *specific* rubric category that addresses the *specific* PLO, (2) indicates the minimally acceptable performance level (Accomplished), and (3) identifies the proportion of students that should meet this level (80%).

Additionally, targets should be meaningfully selected. They might be more or less rigorous depending on the degree level or on past student performance. Program faculty should collectively determine appropriate and meaningful targets.

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

As often as possible, programs should attach instruments used in the assessment process (i.e., rubrics, prompts, surveys, exam items, etc.) as supporting documentation to the Assessment Plan. There is an option to upload supporting documentation in each Measures section, as seen below. Uploaded and selected documents can be previewed by clicking on the “eye” button.



Measure & Target 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 one 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 due to how well students demonstrate a single, specific learning outcome. Furthermore, many course grades also include factors like class participation and attendance. The inclusion of these metrics in the final grade or GPA further complicates the determination of how much a course grade captures achievement on a specific PLO.

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

A: Like course grades (see above), comprehensive or multi-unit exam grades are often quite broad. However, some exams focused on specific topics and/or skills can make them candidates for use in direct assessment. When using exam scores, program faculty should always consider which data would be more meaningful as evidence of a specific PLO: a comprehensive exam grade or performance on specific exam items (e.g., essay questions or a grouping of multiple-choice items relating to the same topic).

Q: Should we use more than one measure to assess a PLO? Do we have to use more than one measure?

A: Consider this: Diplomas aren't awarded based on a single exam grade. Relying on one 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 students learn in the program. As a byproduct, use of multiple measures will also facilitate conversations about continuous improvement, especially if those measures are taken from various courses.

Q: Why isn't it appropriate to report a comprehensive rubric score as evidence of a PLO?

A: Aggregating scores across categories in a rubric is not inherently problematic. Many multi-criteria rubrics exist in which each individual criterion may directly relate to the overall learning outcome (for example, AAC&U rubrics). However, depending on the specificity of the learning outcome, 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 also include a criterion for Grammar, Syntax, and Mechanics. If the PLO is specific to research skills, only results from the research-related criteria should be reported.

Q: What are some examples of acceptable targets that include a specific proportion of students expected to meet the minimally acceptable performance level?

A: Here are some examples of acceptable 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.
- 75% of students will select that they are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the faculty in their major department on the graduating senior survey.
- Open-ended survey questions will reveal favorable overarching themes.
- Each submitted developmental portfolio will demonstrate growth (*as defined by the program*) in incorporating credible research sources.

Sometimes the minimally acceptable performance level is an average, in which case a proportion of students does not need to be reported. For example: The average score on the related rubric criterion will be at least 4.0.

Q: How often, if at all, should targets be updated?

A: Program faculty should revisit targets annually and update them as necessary, particularly if the targets are met year after year. Targets that are consistently met every 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 PLO.

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 revised year-to-year, we suggest instituting a naming convention that includes the assessment cycle to which the document is relevant. Documents linked to measures in assessment forms from the previous cycle are carried forward into the new assessment forms every year (accessible from the "Manage Artifacts" menu at the top right of the form), so using this kind of naming convention will make it easier for new Program Coordinators to see the historical record of assessment-related documents.

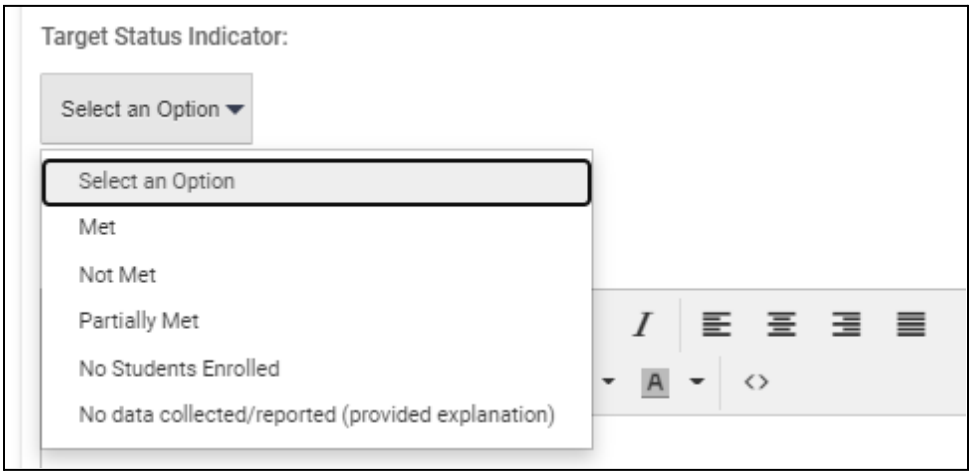
Q: We have more than one target for one of our measures. How should we indicate this in the assessment form?

A: At the bottom of each Measure & Target section there is an "+Add Target" button. Additional Target text boxes can be added using this feature. If multiple targets are created for a measure, remember to report the results for each target when the time comes to enter Findings. Alternatively, multiple targets can be listed in a single Target text box.

Findings

Findings are the results from analysis of assessment data. Strong Assessment Reports will consistently communicate findings in a clear manner using language that aligns with the related measure and target.

In addition to the findings statement itself, programs should select the appropriate designation—whether the target was "Met," "Not Met," or "Partially Met"—from the provided list. This is called the **Target Status Indicator**. Programs are *not* penalized if their target(s) are not met. What is important with any target and finding is that there is reflection.



Criteria

1. Target Status Indicator is accurate based on the reported findings.

Target Status Indicators are used to indicate whether the target was "Met," "Not Met," or "Partially Met." Please see the FAQs section for information about the appropriate use of "Partially Met." The findings statement should support the selected indicator. If no findings are reported, either "No students enrolled" or "No data collected/reported" should be selected (with an explanation accompanying the latter selection).

2. Current findings are compared to previous assessment findings and/or other relevant trends.

The main findings are reported in the "Findings" text box in the assessment form. There is a second text box in which programs are prompted to briefly reflect on how the current findings compare to the findings from the last time the PLO was measured. If possible, findings should

be discussed in the context of past results, as the longitudinal pattern of findings can provide valuable information to the program. If a mean result is reported, it may be useful to report the sample size along with the mean to provide further context for the finding. If the PLO has not been assessed before, what do the findings imply about student achievement of the outcome? Are there any other contextual factors that might be relevant?

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

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

- The Assessment Report includes two programs with different credentials (e.g., MS/PhD or BA/BS combined in a single Report)
- The Assessment Report 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 Report 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 that fall into any of the three categories listed above (or any combination of the above) are **required** to disaggregate assessment results by these characteristics.

How to Report "No Findings"

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

- ***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*:** There are several valid reasons this option might be selected but it must always be accompanied by a brief explanation. Most often it will be selected if there are too few students enrolled in a given academic year (see below), or if there are too few students at the point in the curriculum where assessment data is collected.

What constitutes "too few" students?

- Fewer than 10 students for undergraduate degree programs and certificates

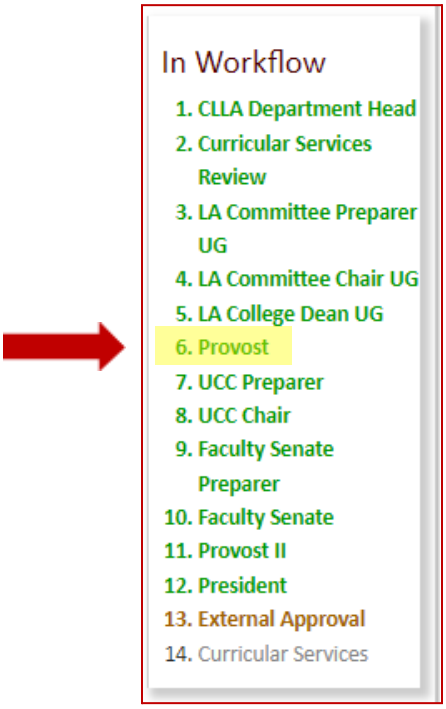
- Fewer than 5 students for graduate degree programs and certificates

Programs with **uncharacteristically** low enrollment (or an uncharacteristically small number of students from whom assessment data could be collected) are not required to report assessment results (see numbers above). **Programs that experience *consistently* low enrollment from year-to-year ARE required to report assessment results annually.** We recommend aggregating results across multiple cycles for reporting. Please refer to the FAQs section for more information.

Inactivated Programs

Some degree programs and certificates going through the inactivation process in the Curricular Approval Request System (CARS) are exempt from submitting an Assessment Report. Specifically, inactivation proposals that have been approved at the **Provost** level can suspend their assessment efforts. If you have questions about the inactivation process in CARS, please contact OIEE at assessment@tamu.edu.

Inactivation of the program must be approved at the "Provost" step in CARS. Please be aware the "Provost" step is not always Step 6!



Findings FAQs

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

A: "Partially Met" should ONLY be selected when reporting findings for compound or 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 higher on **two** of the criteria, but only 75% achieved a 3 or higher on the other two criteria. This Target would be Partially Met. *Partially Met should NOT be selected if the target was close to being met.*

Q: There is consistently low enrollment in the program—can we always just select "No data collected/reported" if there are too few students on which to report assessment results?

A: No. Only programs that *occasionally* experience low enrollment should select "No data collected/reported". Programs with consistently low enrollment must utilize other methods of reporting results. We recommend combining current assessment results with those 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 guide continuous improvement efforts.

Q: All the targets are met, which is an indication our students are performing well. Can we just say that in the "Implications" text box?

A: Saying simply that the findings indicate students are performing well does not indicate there was reflection on the findings. The findings should be contextualized. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but one of the most powerful ways to discuss the meaning of results for 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 Findings statements be structured?

A: There is not a prescribed template all Findings 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 (in the second text box):** Contextualize the results by discussing longitudinal data trends, presenting other supporting data (if available), and/or by reflecting on the results.

Q: Should we upload supporting documentation for our findings? If so, what are some examples of appropriate documentation?

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

Q: We identified multiple targets for one of our measures but there is only one place to report findings for that measure. How should we report our results?

A: Simply address all targets in the "Findings" text box. We recommend numbering the findings statements based on how many targets were established (1, 2, 3, etc.). In the second text box that prompts you to discuss implications or past results, feel free to discuss each finding separately or to discuss the findings more holistically. If you wish, you can include multiple targets in a single Target text box, as well.

Use of Results for Seeking Improvement

Programs engage in ***continuous improvement*** when they use their annually collected assessment data to make systematic changes that will facilitate gradual enhancement of student learning and overall improvement of the program for its students.

The action discussed in the *Use of Results* section of the Assessment Report should have a close, clear connection to the data collected during the assessment cycle. The action should be curricular in nature.

Developing an Action Based on Assessment Results

The development of an action should be a collaborative decision-making process driven by program faculty. The action does not need to be a resource-demanding overhaul to the program or curriculum. It should be specific, identifiable, and able to be implemented in an intentional way.

Examples of appropriate actions include, but are not limited to:

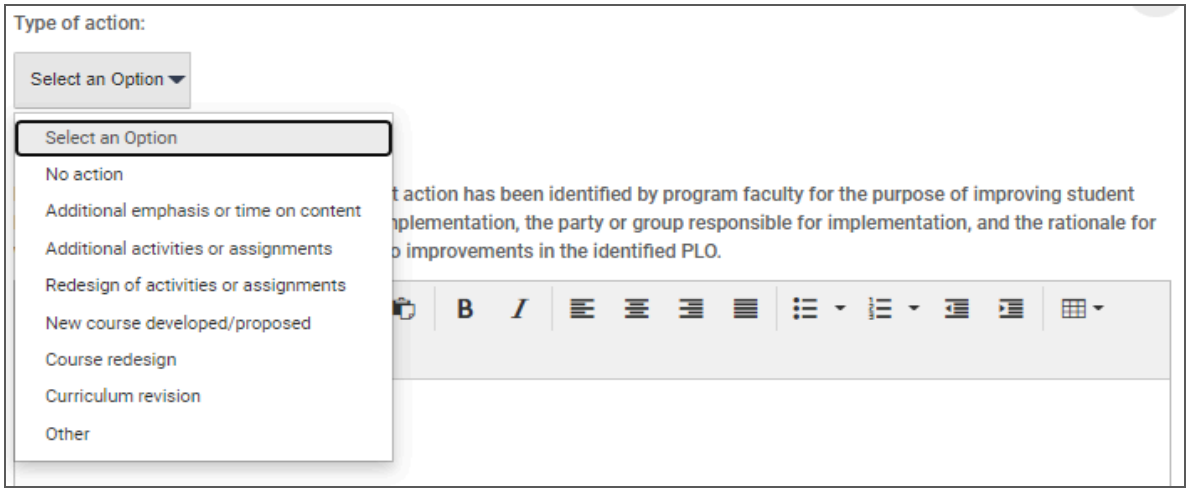
- A course-level adjustment at any point in the curriculum
- Introduction of a new text, new assignments, learning materials, etc.
- Guest lecturer in a specific course
- New programming or activities designed to enhance and improve PLO results
- Prerequisite or other curriculum-based adjustment
- Changes to practice assignment requirements
- Changes to advising strategies that directly impact learning
- Additional required trainings for faculty, staff, or students

 Every program is expected to establish and submit a minimum of one action or change that fulfills the criteria below, **regardless of whether all targets are met.**

Criteria

1. *Action is designed to improve student learning.*

   Program Coordinators are prompted to select the type of action being taken (see below). The categories in the dropdown menu are broad “bucket” categories in which most curricular actions tend to fall. Please note there is an “Other” option.



The Use of Results description should clearly articulate a specific course of action designed to improve student achievement of a targeted PLO. There should be enough detail provided that an external reviewer is able to understand which finding is informing the action, what the action entails, how the action relates to the targeted PLO, and what the various implementation details are (e.g., responsible party, planned timeline, timeline for re-assessment of the targeted PLO).

"No action" should only be selected in two cases: (1) The program is new enough that no assessment has taken place, or (2) there was *uncharacteristically* low enrollment during the assessment period (see Findings section for more details).

2. *Action explains how faculty and program leadership were involved in the development of the action.*

Program assessment should be a faculty-owned and faculty-driven process. Individuals who hold leadership positions in the program and/or department should be involved in some capacity. The response to this prompt in the assessment form should describe how both faculty *and* program leadership were involved in the discussion and decision-making about the specific action that will be implemented based on current assessment findings.

The information reported in the assessment form should not be written on behalf of an individual Program Coordinator, but on behalf of all program faculty. Discussions about findings and continuous improvement should be held as a faculty group prior to submission of the Report.

There is an optional Supporting Documents upload in this section of the report form. If the program has formal plans drawn up, or any other supplemental documentation that might be helpful to include, those documents can be uploaded and linked here.

Use of Results FAQs

Q: Do we have to establish an action for every assessment finding included in the Assessment Report?

A: No, this is not required. Ideally, though, programs will be prepared to address all PLOs for which targets were not met. During the planning stage, program faculty should consider the program's capacity for engaging in continuous improvement. For example, programs that plan to assess five or six PLOs in a cycle would ideally be prepared to determine appropriate actions for all of those PLOs should all targets be unmet.

Q: Can the action be to change the program's assessment strategy?

A: The expectation is that at least one action will be a curricular change designed to improve student learning directly. Changes to measurement strategies and/or to the overall assessment process do not fit this criterion but could be added as supplemental actions if the program wishes to do so.

Q: How do we determine an appropriate, intentional action when all the targets are met?

A: Met targets indicate that PLOs are achievable within the context of those targets. In practice, it is rare that every single student will know all there is to know about a certain topic or be able to demonstrate a particular skill at a mastery level. There is always room for improvement, even in the highest performing programs. Strategies for identifying continuous improvement opportunities include but are not limited to:

- Drilling down into the results further, perhaps by demographic information, course section, mode of delivery, or some other dimension to identify possible gaps or disparities.
- Adjusting the target in future Assessment Plans AND explaining how faculty will help students meet the higher target.

If the program's action is to adjust the target, it is *critical* to include a discussion of what action the program will take to help students meet the new target. This keeps the focus of the action on a

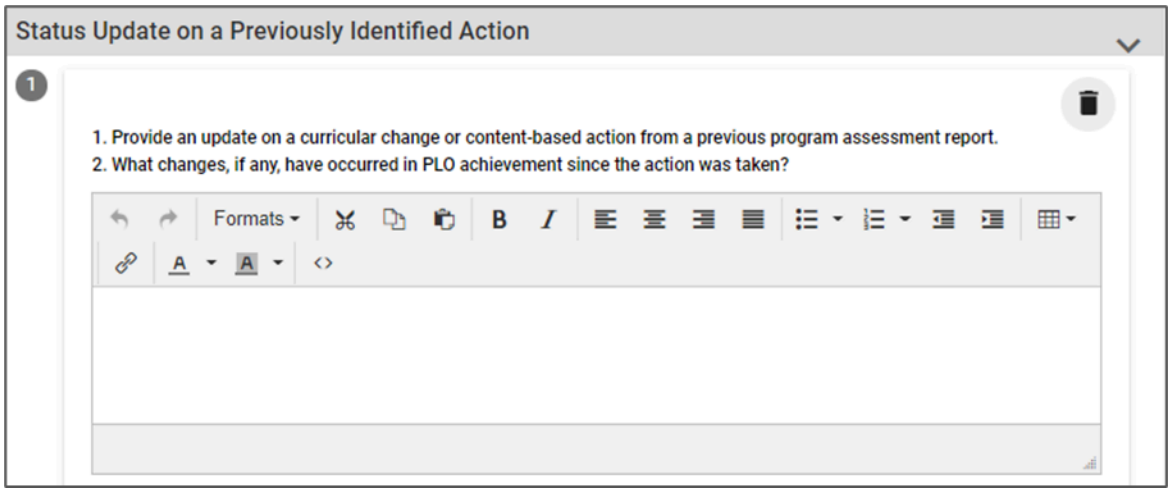
curricular change rather than simply on updating the target (which would be considered a change to the assessment strategy).

Q: If we plan to implement several different actions, how should we document this in the assessment form?

A: As long as it is clear which findings are informing each action, it is up to the program how to document actions in the Use of Results section. We recommend using the "+Add Use of Results" button to add a new section for each PLO for which an action will be implemented.

Status Update on a Previously Identified Action

In this section, the program is prompted to identify a learning-centered action from a previous Assessment Report and provide an update. The program should explain what changes, if any, have been seen in the PLO assessment results since the implementation of the action. If the action has not yet been fully implemented, describe what stage of the implementation process the program is in and when faculty expect to be able re-assess the targeted PLO(s).



The previously implemented action should be one that was submitted in a past Assessment Report. See page 7 for instructions on how to access completed Assessment Reports in HelioCampus.

Criteria

1. *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, the findings that prompted the action, and which PLO(s) it was intended to improve.

2. *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).

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

Consider the impact the action may have had on the learning outcome results. Whether results were improved or not improved, reflect on what role the action may have played. It may be relevant to 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%.

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 with respect to a particular learning outcome.

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 from other Assessment Reports 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: In this scenario there won't be a previous action on which to provide an update, so this can simply be stated in the Status Update textbox. Additionally, brand new programs are 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. 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. Results from different measures can be compared holistically. 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 were curricular in nature, the program should instead discuss another curricular change made in the program over the last few years, specifically explaining how the curricular change relates to the targeted PLO(s).

Final Approvers (Department)

Department leadership should be actively engaged in the program assessment process, particularly when it comes to reviewing assessment data and developing data-informed actions. In addition, department leadership is responsible for the final approval of Assessment Reports.

The Final Approver role in the annual review process allows Department Heads (and/or Assistant Deans) to complete a final quality check of Assessment Reports before they are submitted to OIEE. Final Approvers will be notified via email when Assessment Reports are available for final review.

Email Notifications

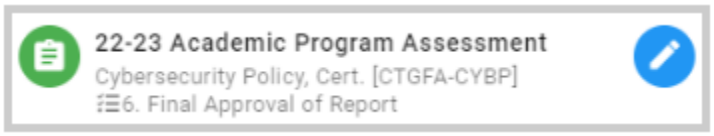
HelioCampus sends an email notification to the Final Approver when a Program Coordinator submits their Assessment Report for final review. The sender of these email notifications is listed as The Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation, but the emails are sent automatically by the HelioCampus system. **Please carefully read these emails as they include due dates for report approval.**

Log in to HelioCampus

Go to https://tamu.aefis.net to log in to HelioCampus. You will be automatically redirected to authenticate through CAS (Central Authentication Service) using your NetID and password.

Access Assessment Reports

Assessment Reports are found in the Action Items list on the right side of the screen after logging in. 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. Reports ready for review are labeled “6. Final Approval of Report” as seen below. Click the blue pencil icon to review the report.



None of the fields are editable except for a section at the bottom of the form under the header *Final Approver (Department) Comments.*

Approve and/or Reject Assessment Reports

All information in the report, including internal and external feedback provided up to that point, is viewable by the Final Approver. Final Approvers should read through the report, paying particular attention to the *Findings* and *Use of Results* sections. It may also be useful to review the feedback that was provided by college-level Liaisons at earlier stages in the workflow. The Final Approver's final determination should be based on whether the reported information is accurate to the best of their knowledge.

- **Determination: Approved** – Final Approvers should select *Yes* in the form, indicating they have reviewed and approve the report. Comments can also be added. Finally, click *Approve* and *Submit the Form* to send the approved report to OIEE.

- **Determination: Revisions Necessary** – Final Approvers should select *No, report requires revision* and provide specific direction in the text box. Then, click *Reject* and *Submit the Form*. This action sends the report back to the Program Coordinator for revision. The system will automatically notify the Program Coordinator the following morning that the report has been returned to them. Final Approvers will be prompted to review the report again when the Program Coordinator resubmits.

OIEE Review

At the end of the Program Assessment cycle, OIEE staff review all Assessment Reports, provide final comments, and assign a Compliance Indicator. Compliance Indicators are meant to inform Program Coordinators and Liaisons of how well documentation requirements were met and to identify where additional support might be beneficial during the documentation cycle. The rubric below is used to assign Compliance Indicators.

Compliance Indicator	Description
Exemplary	The report goes above and beyond minimum requirements. This may include the following: ● There is more than one measure for each Program Learning Outcome (PLO). ● Thorough, detailed responses in each section—data collection methods, data analysis, scoring metrics, rubrics, etc.—are included so that the assessment process is clear and replicable. ● Findings are contextualized and appropriately disaggregated (if applicable). ● Use of results is clear, detailed, and focused on student learning.
Sufficient	All minimum requirements are met: ● PLOs have at least one direct measure and all measures are aligned with their respective PLO(s). ● The report is clear overall. Some areas could be strengthened by including more detail. ● Use of results is focused on student learning (i.e., a learning-centered curricular action). The planned execution may not be fully clear, but the intent is.
Needs Improvement	One or more of the following is true: ● Assessment process is difficult to follow and may not be clearly replicable. ● Components of the report are misaligned (e.g., the measure does not clearly align with the PLO). ● Findings are not disaggregated, if applicable (e.g., DE and FTF results, or MS and PhD results). ● Use of results may not be clearly focused on student learning (e.g., describes a change to the assessment plan and/or a plan for program leadership to meet and discuss findings), BUT the rest of the assessment plan/ report is strong. ● Program leadership and faculty involvement in assessment may not be clearly documented.
Noncompliant	Report was not submitted, or one or more required components of the report is missing, such as a PLO, direct measure, and/or use of results. The report does not demonstrate the program's commitment to continuous improvement of student learning.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation

Purpose

The goal of assessment is to use data to make informed decisions about teaching, learning, program delivery, equity, and overall institutional effectiveness. Engaging in systematic, integrated, and thoughtful assessment of student learning, the student learning experience, and administrative and support functions helps our campus to ensure a high-quality, equitable experience for all students. OIEE is committed to this endeavor and to assisting our faculty and staff in the continuous improvement of their programs and processes.

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HelioCampus Login for Texas A&M University: https://tamu.aefis.net/