Boilerplate Feedback for Graduate Programs

This resource is intended to support Liaisons in providing relevant feedback on assessment reports submitted by graduate programs. It includes examples of common focus areas and corresponding boilerplate feedback that can be adapted or used as-is, depending on the needs of the program.

**Use of this feedback is completely optional.** Liaisons are encouraged to personalize or expand upon the suggestions provided here. This resource is a supplement to the *Academic Assessment Liaison Manual* which can be found [here](https://assessment.tamu.edu/assessment/academic-program-assessment/college-school-liaison).

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| Focus Area in *PLOs* | Feedback |
| PLO does not reflect graduate-level expectations (e.g., might be written as an [UG learning outcome](https://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/student-learning-outcomes/)) | At the graduate level, outcomes should reflect the expectations of advanced study. This often includes independent inquiry, critical integration of disciplinary knowledge, or the creation of original work. When outcomes are too general or closely resemble undergraduate outcomes, they may not fully capture the depth or scope of graduate-level achievement. Consider whether the outcome clearly communicates what distinguishes graduate students’ learning in the program. |

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| Focus Area in *Measures* | Feedback |
| No articulated standards for faculty-evaluated student work | In cases where faculty interpret performance (e.g., written work, oral exams, or creative projects) the evaluation criteria should be explicitly defined. Even when there is a shared understanding of what constitutes strong graduate-level work, stating those expectations supports consistency and transparency across the program. Clear, articulated standards strengthen both the reliability of the assessment process and the actionability of its results. |
| Only end-of-program measures are used | While end-of-program measures like final defenses, dissertation documents, or comprehensive exams are hallmarks of graduate study, they often serve as confirmations of expected success rather than tools for diagnosing learning needs. Additionally, only students deemed prepared to succeed typically reach this point, meaning that data may exclude those who could have benefited from earlier intervention.  To gain a more comprehensive and actionable view of student learning, consider supplementing with earlier-stage assessments. Collecting data earlier in the program is especially important as students transition into individualized academic and research work. |

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| Focus Area in *Targets* | Feedback |
| Same target used across multiple points in the program  (e.g., annual evaluation or repeated milestone) | When the same measure is used across multiple points in the program, consider whether identical performance expectations are appropriate. Students earlier in the program are typically still developing skills, while those near completion should be demonstrating more advanced, independent work. Establishing stage-specific targets supports a more accurate picture of growth over time and ensures the assessment reflects meaningful progression toward graduate-level expectations. |
| Target is too broad to inform improvement, particularly if it is conservatively set  (e.g., 95% will pass the defense, Average score will be 80%, 75% will receive proficient or above on all rubric items, etc.) | Targets should be specific and diagnostic enough to support reflection and continuous improvement. When targets are set around broad or easily met benchmarks, they may confirm success but offer little insight into variation in student performance. Consider whether the target could be refined to highlight differences in achievement (e.g., referring to performance levels or specific criteria) to better support data-informed program decisions. |
| Target overlooks selective nature of the measure | When a measure applies only to students who have been pre-approved or deemed ready to advance, the associated target should acknowledge that it reflects only a subset of the student population. Later, findings written to align with targets that overlook this selectivity may unintentionally present an inflated view of program-wide achievement. Even when the target is appropriately ambitious, its usefulness for program improvement may be limited if the data exclude students who may have struggled earlier in the process. Consider refining the target or adding context to clarify which students are represented in the results. |

**Feedback on *Findings***

The Findings section often requires more individualized feedback. The nature and clarity of the findings are highly dependent on how the program interprets and presents its results, which can vary significantly even when the underlying plan is sound. Therefore, boilerplate feedback may be less effective here.

When PLOs, measures, and targets have been meaningfully developed and/or revised, the findings are more likely to be clear and actionable. At that point, the Liaison role shifts from addressing structural issues in the plan to offering targeted, customized nudges that support interpretation and transparency.

If structural issues persist in the Findings, feedback from the planning sections can often be adapted to address those issues. Otherwise, the following common “nudges” may be sufficient:

* Prompting clarification of overly general statements (e.g., “Can you speak to specific areas of strength or weakness?”)
* Encouraging interpretation when little analysis offered, particularly in cases where all targets were met
* Reminding programs to discuss findings in relation to the PLO—not just within the context of the assignment/instrument
* Asking whether students *not* represented in the findings (e.g., due to exclusions, attrition, delays) were considered in the interpretation
  + This is particularly relevant in programs where measures capture only a subset of students. Programs should be encouraged to consider whether findings reflect the full range of student experiences, including those who struggled or did not persist.

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| Focus Area in *Use of Results* | Feedback |
| Action is vague and not clearly tied to instruction/curriculum | Include additional detail to clarify how the action will be implemented and evaluated. This is particularly important in graduate programs where there is a lot of focus on independent study, research, or faculty mentorship—and assessment can feel somewhat removed from instructional decision-making. Strengthening the Use of Results with a clearer description of what will be done, who will carry it out, and when it will occur can help ensure the action has meaningful impact. |
| Action focuses on individual student interventions | In lower-enrolled graduate programs, missed targets may result from the performance of one or two students. While individual support may be appropriate, program-level assessment involves identifying whether an underlying factor contributed to the learning outcome results—such as misalignment between expectations and preparation, unclear evaluation criteria, or gaps in early-stage instruction. Strong assessment practice includes reflection on whether a broader change could prevent similar issues in future cycles. |
| *For reports that include multiple credentials* Action does not clearly apply to all included credentials | It isn’t clear whether the described action applies to all included credentials or just one. When reporting multiple credentials together, it is important to clarify this distinction and consider whether separate actions are needed based on differences in curriculum, student population, or learning expectations. |
| *For reports that include both DE and FTF offerings*  Distance modality not addressed in Use of Results | Because this report includes a distance education program, it is important to clarify how the proposed action will support learners in digital or remote environments. The current description either references only in-person instruction or omits distance learners altogether. The current description either refers only to in-person instruction or does not specify whether distance learners are included. Please consider whether the action applies across all modalities, and if not, whether a parallel strategy is planned to meet the needs of distance students. |
| *For interdisciplinary programs & certificates*  Cross-disciplinary collaboration not evident | In interdisciplinary programs, assessment results and improvement plans should ideally reflect input from faculty across contributing disciplines. If collaboration is still emerging, consider ways to expand engagement so the full scope of the program is represented in the interpretation of results and planned improvements. |

**Feedback on the *Status Update***

This is another section that may require more individualized feedback. The most common focus areas in this section can typically be addressed with the boilerplate feedback in the *Academic Assessment Liaison Manual* found [here](https://assessment.tamu.edu/assessment/academic-program-assessment/college-school-liaison).