

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

QUICK GUIDE

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Purpose and Basic Process

NC State Academic Assessment is intended to provide systematic data for the continual enhancement of programs rather than to provide proof for accountability. As such, the process is designed so that faculty determine what is important (curricular outcomes), how it is taught, how it is measured (using direct evidence), how the data is interpreted (identifying strengths and areas for improvement), and what actions, if any based on findings, should be taken to enhance the curriculum.

In addition to the facilitation of the academic assessment process, the Office of Assessment evaluates General Education competencies, the THINK (QEP) program, and the co-curricular programs in DASA.

The reporting process is intended to be a snapshot of the assessment within each degree program to provide information regarding how outcome data is being utilized for decisions by the academic leadership in the department, college and university. Examples of plans and reports can be found here.

Basic Requirements

Each degree program and transcribed certificate:

1. Will have a set of comprehensive student learning outcomes (often 4 to 7) which are measurable and can all be assessed within a 3 to 5 year cycle;
2. Will use direct measures of learning that are specifically aligned with the outcomes;
3. Will analyze the data at a level that allows for the identification of strengths and areas for improvement within the curricular outcome (e.g. no holistic rubric scores, no test or course grades, BUT scores for elements within the rubric or sets of test questions mapped to an element of the outcome are suited for analysis);
4. Will make clear decisions based on the data collected (e.g. change to the curriculum, change to a course, change to an assignment, or the determination that no change is currently necessary).

Key Definitions

Direct Evidence - collecting information that requires the students to display their knowledge and skills (Direct Evidence) rather than the student or others indicating that they believe the student learned something (Indirect Evidence).

Embedded Assessment - gathering information about student learning that is built into the teaching /learning process. This may include test questions, projects, presentations etc. that are already part of the course/ curriculum.

Value-added Assessment - using pre/post data to determine how much learning has occurred over a specified period of time.

Objective - are broad, general statements of [1] what the program wants students to be able to do and to know or [2] what the program will do to ensure what students will be able to do and to know (as defined by CUPR faculty at NC State).

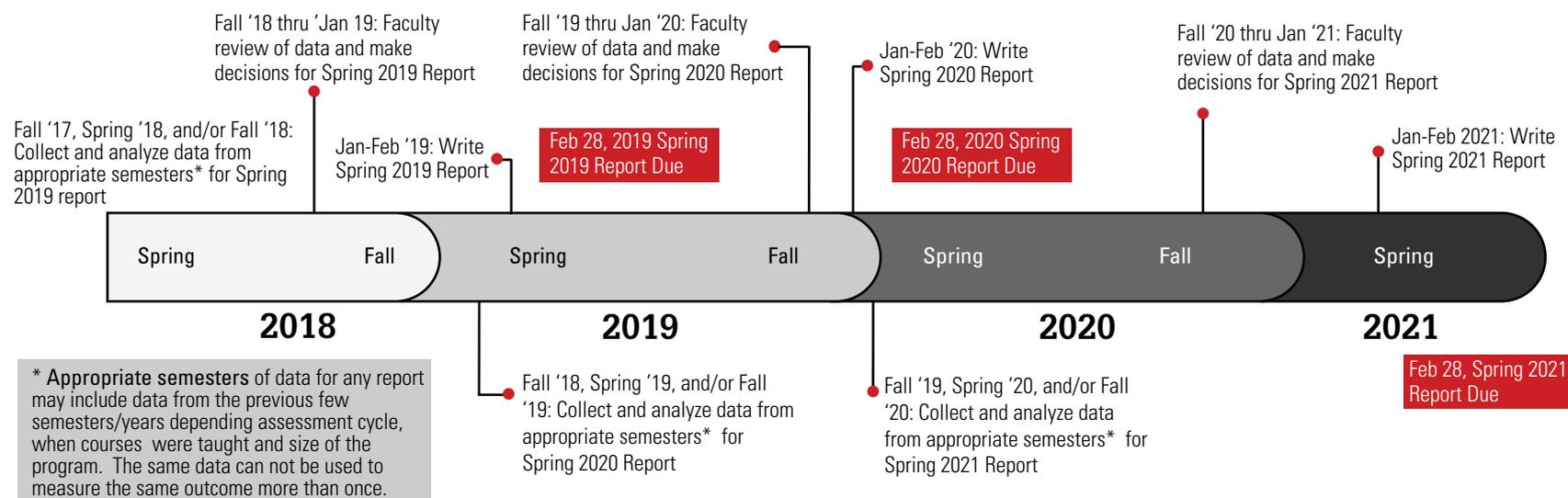
Outcome - more detailed and specific statements derived from the objectives/goals; they are detailed and meaningful enough to guide decisions in program planning and improvement, and decisions regarding pedagogy and practice. Curricular outcomes are less specific than course outcomes and will need to be defined in such a way that the content elements within the outcome can be measured to provide information for strengths and areas for improvement.

Consider Your Audience

When determining your outcomes, evidence to be collected and analysis strategies, it is important to take into account your audience. Think about how they will respond to each part of the process and if your procedures meet both the spirit of the process and its requirements. What will each audience require to support the interpretation of your findings and any decisions made based on the data? Do they agree with the curricular outcomes? What type of data will they expect? What projects and from what courses?

Potential Audiences:

- Program Faculty:
 - Program, Department, or College
- Department Head
- Associate Dean/Dean
- Office of Assessment
- Accreditors:
 - SACS/COC (Regional Accreditor)
 - Program Accreditors



Collecting Evidence: Program Level

Many options for collecting evidence do not involve additional measures, such as using data from an upper-level course (test questions, projects, etc..) The intention is not to assess the course or faculty member, but to assess the curriculum. By the time a student reaches upper-level courses or capstone classes, they are usually displaying knowledge gained throughout the curriculum when creating projects or other tasks. Upper-level courses often have assignments that can be used to measure multiple, if not all, curricular outcomes. Some common ways faculty collect evidence of student learning for curricular assessment:

Comprehensive Discipline Exam: Can be created in-house or by using a national instrument. The vital piece to keep in mind is how you will retrieve the data upon completion and that you are provided with more than holistic scores so that you can determine strengths and areas for improvement.

Test Questions: Some faculty take groups of test questions and map them to the content elements within an outcome. This provides evidence at the appropriate level to determine strengths and areas for improvement.

Rubric: "a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment" (Stevens & Levi, 2005, p. 3). For assessment of the curriculum, it is a way of organizing criteria to systematically determine if the outcome is met by articulating the key elements within the outcome. Faculty often use rubrics to assess curricular outcomes by applying them to activities in a senior-level course or capstone such as presentations, capstone project, portfolios, research paper, or case studies.

There are multiple types of rubrics that have varying levels of detail. The common types are: Check-list, Rating Scale, Descriptive, Holistic, and Structured Observation Guide.

Analysis

- Data must be reported at a level such that strengths and areas for improvement within the outcome can be identified. Overall means or other holistic scores, such as grades, do not allow for the identification of either.
- When using a rubric, data should be presented at the item/element level (i.e. each aspect of the rubric).
- When reporting means, frequencies/percentages should also be provided, as this too can help uncover patterns or trends useful in highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Decisions

- For each area for improvement, the report must include new actions that the program has already begun to implement to improve students' achievement of the specific outcome, such as: "We developed...", "We revised...", "We implemented our plan to..." *Note usage of past tense. Please do not use language in the future tense or language that is indecisive in tone such as "We are considering. ., We may..."
- If there is no evidence that any change is needed, then it is okay to say something like: "Based on the data, no changes are needed at this time."
- Not all needed changes are big! Some changes will be things like additional class time, materials, assignments or practice on a given topic in an existing course.

Reporting

- The report is just a snapshot of the process. It does not need to be long to demonstrate that the faculty are engaged. Clear alignment from the outcome to the decisions is very important. Be sure that it is apparent how the method used measures that particular outcome, how the data identifies strengths and areas for improvement, and how any areas for improvement (and sometimes strengths) were addressed with a specific decision.

Resources/References

NC State University Office of Assessment
assessment.dasa.ncsu.edu

"Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide" Suskie (2010)

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