

# Conducting an Annual Academic Assessment of Student Learning

Institutional Assessment  
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*Oklahoma Baptist  
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*Continuous Quality  
Enhancement*

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## Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the basic steps for conducting an annual academic assessment of student learning outcomes at Oklahoma Baptist University. It also includes the development of Action Plans and the elements required for input into WEAVE.

This document supersedes guidance provided for previous academic years.

Academic Assessment for the 2015-16 academic year should be completed by 1 June 2016, with Action Plans in place (as necessary) by 1 August 2016. Each academic program (degree, major, or concentration) should identify at least ONE opportunity for improvement with an Action Plan that institutes changes in 2016-17.

### Introduction

Because teaching is a primary mission of OBU, evidence of student learning is a measure of our success as an educational institution. Regional accrediting agencies across the United States require that universities provide evidence of student learning and program improvement to demonstrate their effectiveness as educational institutions.<sup>1</sup> *Student Learning Outcomes* (SLOs) specify what students will know and be able to do as a result of completing their degree programs. Student Learning Outcomes (a) are consistent with the mission of the university, college, and department, and (b) align with the values of the faculty.

Student Learning Outcomes serve to describe how the program mission is implemented. SLOs form a blueprint of how the key principles of the program mission are met. A SLO should represent one aspect of what a graduate of a program will know, be able to do, or what attributes that individual will have.

In the autumn of 2015, each academic program (degree, major, or concentration) created an academic assessment plan and entered it into the WEAVE application. That annual assessment plan should have included a mission, 3-5 SLOs, measures for those SLOs, and targets that indicate success in those measures.

The following pages offer some instructions for the assessment process. Faculty should remember that academic assessment is a process, not a product. However, we must have a product—the documentation in WEAVE—that demonstrates institutional faithfulness to the process.

The assessment process may begin at any time after the data or artifacts that are being used to support the measures and targets for the SLOs are available. This process is intended to take only a few hours, including the process of documenting findings.

### What is the Anticipated Result of this Process?

Each program should assess each of the SLOs that has current data and enter the result of that assessment into WEAVE. Each program should identify *at least* ONE improvement opportunity or change that results from the assessment process. These improvement opportunities may fall into one of four categories: 1) A change to the curriculum, including revision of particular lessons within a course; 2) A change to the measurement tool or process, which may include a modified rubric or a different assignment, to better reflect desired outcomes; 3) A change to the SLOs if it is clear that the program should assess a different aspect of student learning or a different focus is needed; or 4) The addition of some non-curricular element to the program, such as an emphasis on study skills, a meeting with the Success Center, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The requirement for regular assessment of Student Learning Outcomes and the use of those assessments for improving student learning is one of the Core Components of the HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. See: <https://www.hlcommission.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/criteria-and-core-components.html>

Ultimately the assessment process needs to answer the following questions:

- 1) Did the students learn what we expected?
- 2) What must we do to improve the learning outcomes of students?
- 3) Does the assessment plan lead us to true answers about important aspects of student learning?

## The Assessment Report

The Assessment Report will be housed in WEAVE. It is intended to be an artifact that represents the output of the assessment process. It is NOT intended to be an exhaustive account of the assessment process, but represent what faculty discovered through assessment.

When preparing to write the Assessment Report, there are three questions faculty should seek to answer:

- A. **What is the status of Student Learning with respect to the measures and targets?** For each measure, did the students meet or not meet the the target? Every measure will need to have a status as “met,” “not met,” “partially met,” or “not assessed.”
  - a. If the measure and target were not assessed, then give a simple explanation why. (E.g., “This course is taught every other Spring, so it could not be assessed this year.”)
- B. **How did you come to your conclusion about the status of student learning relative to the measure and target?** For example

“This measure was not met. Only 70% of students scored a 3 or better based on the rubric. The faculty met on 14 May 2016 and scored 37 student papers. 26 students scored a 3 or better. The average student score was a 2.6 out of four. The student papers show a general weakness in the ability to charitably interact with other viewpoints and support their thesis through careful critical thinking.”

“This measure was partially met. While 100% of students were in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on the MFT, only 3 students took this exam this year. The median score was in the 87<sup>th</sup> percentile, which compares favorably to other programs at major universities. However, due to the small sample size, firm conclusions cannot be drawn. The faculty will continue to monitor this SLO with the present curriculum.”

“This measure was met. 90% of students students achieved over 75% on the portion of the final exam focused on labeling significant eras in the history of the discipline. Overall 18 of 20 students were successful, with an average score of 87%. The program will continue to monitor progress of this SLO. There were some inconsistencies in the dating of several eras, so the faculty will work toward developing a standardized handout with a timeline to improve consistency across sections in the department.”

- C. **What needs to change to make it better?** Even if the students meet the measure and target, you may see some simple ways to improve. If students do not meet the measure and target, then some sort of improvement should be identified. Some examples:
  - a. “The students in [class] will be given a copy of the rubric with their syllabus. Faculty will explain the rubric several weeks before the essay is due.”
  - b. “Further emphasis appears to be required on [some concept]. An additional article will be assigned beginning in the fall semester and a homework question will be included on the syllabus.”
  - c. “Scoring was complicated by vague wording between 2 and 3 on the rubric in the critical thinking dimension. Faculty will reword the rubric for use next year.”
  - d. “Students seem to fail to grasp an earlier concept from the introductory course. The faculty have agreed to increase the emphasis on this concept in the Common Core class. Additionally, a brief review of the topic will be added to this course beginning in the spring of next year.”
  - e. “This assignment is ill suited for measuring this student learning outcome. Instead, the faculty have agreed to assess this SLO in [course] with [whatever assignment]. The assessment plan will be updated for the next academic year.”
  - f. “The faculty have realized that demonstrating a deep understanding of this concept, as required by

the SLO, is inconsistent with the curriculum and the market expectations of graduates. Therefore, this SLO will be replaced by one that evaluates the application of a different skill [give specifics]”.

The assessment report should give a simple explanation of what you discovered relative to the measures of student learning, what you think it means, and what you intend to do about it. This should take a only few hundred words in most cases, unless there is a complicated explanation.

The bottom line is that the assessment report, which will be housed in WEAVE as a “Finding” should explain to someone who is not intimately familiar with the program whether the target was met, what that status means, and what you intend to do about it. It will contain some information that sounds like an Action Plan, but an Action Plan will be discussed further below.

## Action Plan

An Action Plan builds on the Assessment Report (and in fact, it attaches to the Finding in WEAVE) to explain what you intend to do about what you found.

An Action Plan is **required** for any Findings that indicate “Not Met” or “Partially Met.” An Action Plan *may* be included for Findings that indicate “Met,” but this is based on the judgment of the faculty doing the assessment.

Action Plans are not intended to be complicated project plans that meet rigorous design criteria and have multiple layers. In fact, simple is best. Action Plans are a means for us to check up to see that we’ve actually done what we said we were going to do.

Some types of Action Plans that might come out of Annual Academic Assessment:

- a. It may be that you’ve already completed the necessary action when you write the report. For example, you may have needed to make a change to your fall syllabus. If you’ve done that, then you will select “Finished” for the Implementation Status on your Action Plan and write a simple explanation of what you did. For example:
  - a. “An additional reading on the types of philosophical dualism has been added to the PHI1100 syllabus and will be implemented beginning in Fall 2016.”
  - b. “[Course] has been added as a prerequisite to this course to ensure the appropriate background knowledge has been achieved by students prior to them taking this course. This was approved by the Faculty Forum on 03/04/16 and by the BOT at the May meeting.”
  - c. “The faculty have revised the rubric for this assessment to better match the desired learning outcomes. This was completed at the end of the assessment meeting in April.”
- b. However, likely there will be simple actions that need to be done at some point in the future. These should be clearly documented, with a due date and responsible party assigned. If this will be achieved in the future, then mark it “Planned” or “In-Progress” and fill in the appropriate sections of WEAVE. Unfortunately, there is no reminder system in WEAVE, so if you assign someone an action, you should also set up a reminder in the Zimbra calendar system. Otherwise, required actions are likely to slip through the cracks. Some examples of this:
  - a. “Address expectations for thesis statements and quality of sources with the Milburn Success Center Staff. This meeting should be scheduled for the middle of August. A reminder has been placed on the calendar of Dr. Smith to ensure this occurs at the beginning of the semester.”
  - b. “Revise the syllabus for [course] to reflect common objectives, which were agreed upon by the Department. A reminder has been placed on the Dean’s calendar before the new semester so that she checks with all faculty when we get back from Summer Break.”
- c. At other times there will be longer term actions that need to take place, which may occur over an academic year or require multiple stages:
  - a. “Analyze the need for a new course in the [major] program that deals with the use of technology in the field. This should be completed by Dr. Smith by Spring ’17 and reported at

the March departmental meeting. A reminder has been placed on the calendar of the Dean and Dr. Smith to ensure progress is made. Progress will be discussed at monthly meetings with College faculty.”

- b. “A new [piece of equipment] is required for the [some science] lab so that students can better understand this phenomenon. The following steps should be taken: 1. Research cost of new machine, Dr. Humbert, 9/30/16; 2. Request money in in the budget, Dean, 2/15/17; 3. Purchase the new machine, Department Head, 6/1/18. Calendar meetings have been established on the Dean’s calendar and the responsible party for each of these steps.”

The point of the Action Plans is NOT to create additional work or continue a do-loop of never ending assessment and paperwork. Instead, it is to document the completion of the necessary steps to implement the changes identified by faculty as a result of annual academic assessment.

If Action Plans are not developed and tracked, it is highly likely that proposed changes would not be implemented and desired gains will not be achieved. Simply put, Action Plans are intended to document changes made and help ensure they are made.

With that in mind, do not allow the Action Plan process overwhelm other academic processes. Keep the proposed plans as simple as possible and as short term as possible. Ensure there is clear ownership for particular actions and that someone in the program understandings their responsibility. Also, use the planning tools available to remind people of their responsibility.

## **Data Entry for WEAVE**

A separate “how-to” guide will be distributed with specific instructions for WEAVE. The minimum elements that are **required** to be entered into WEAVE for each program are:

1. Finding: Put the information described in the “Assessment Report” above in the Finding section and check the appropriate status of the Target (i.e., Met, Not Met, etc.)
2. Action Plan for every Target that is “Not Met” or “Partially Met.” This plan must include:
  - a. Relationship to the appropriate measure and SLO
  - b. An implementation status
  - c. Condensed Description: Identifiable shorthand for the plan
  - d. Description: Explains the details of the plan.
  - e. Projected Completion Date: Reasonable date that allows follow up reporting.
  - f. Responsible Person/Group: Make it clear who owns the project. They should have agreed to this before you finish the Action Plan.

## **Support**

The Director of Assessment and Institutional Research is available for assistance with training on how to develop/revise Program Missions, Student Learning Outcomes, and Measures and Targets. Please contact Spence Spencer at [andrew.spencer@okbu.edu](mailto:andrew.spencer@okbu.edu) or 585-4102.