Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for
Student Learning Outcome Assessment Planning

What are the roles of faculty, chairs, deans, and the Office of Accreditation and Assessment?
The primary responsibility for student learning outcome assessment resides in the faculty within academic departments and programs. To ensure successful implementation, departments often identify one or more people as Assessment Coordinator(s) or as an Assessment Committee. The Assessment Coordinator or Committee ensures that assessments are conducted at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner, and that data is compiled, analyzed, and presented for evaluation by the faculty teaching in the program. The Assessment Coordinator or Committee also monitors the implementation of improvements and ensures that their effects are measured. The Assessment Coordinator or Committee and Department Chair also ensure that the plans and reports are entered in SharePoint in a timely fashion. Department Chairs, College Deans, and Associate Deans for Assessment will have supervisory responsibility over assessment practices and reporting, just as they do over other important academic activities within departments. These administrative officers will be given access to view and comment on assessment plans once reported on the SharePoint system. Absent any feedback by a set date, the Office of Accreditation and Assessment (OAA) will deem that plans are approved. The OAA is responsible for coordinating and supporting various institutional assessment activities, including program assessment, to meet regional accreditation standards set by SACS-COC.

What distinguishes direct and indirect assessment measures?
The type of assessment measure varies by the source material that will be used to evaluate student learning. In particular, direct assessment measures rely on evaluations of course-embedded student work (e.g., homework assignments, essays, locally developed tests, senior theses, oral presentations, research papers) and other metrics of student performance (e.g., National Major Field Achievement Tests, Certification Exams, Licensure Exams, Clinical Evaluations). Indirect assessment measures rely on students' evaluation of their own learning. Surveys are particularly good for revealing students' attitudes and opinions about what they have learned and are useful to evaluate outcomes that are realized in students' post-college careers. Other indirect assessment measures include student focus groups, exit interviews with alumni, reflective essays of how well students performed on an assignment or group project. Program faculty can analyze these data sources to determine whether and to what extent current and/or former students achieved a particular learning outcome. Other indirect measures of student learning rely on statistics that can determine how well students performed in the program, such as graduation and retention rates, job placement statistics, application and acceptance rate to graduate and professional programs, awards received, student publications.

Should programs consider designing a curriculum map?
Although not required, it is recommended that program faculty identify where in the curriculum and coursework the students receive the opportunity to learn the knowledge, practice skills, and develop the attitudes and values incorporated in the learning outcomes. In other words, mapping the distribution of the learning process throughout the program curriculum, will help faculty identify where and how students should be assessed to ultimately determine whether learning outcomes are being achieved. For assistance designing a curriculum map for your program please contact us as assessment@utrgv.edu.

To what extent should programs document decision-making on assessment planning?
Because assessment planning is an involved process that requires substantial consensus building among faculty in your program, we recommend that Assessment Coordinators record and archive enough information in an accessible place that will allow individuals to know when and how decisions were made. In particular, coordinators can save meeting agendas and minutes that describes not only who participated, but also the content that was discussed on the topic of assessment planning. We ask that at minimum, Assessment Coordinators summarize the decision-making that resulted for assessment planning.

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Is it acceptable to use sampling techniques for evaluating student work?
If your program is large, you can randomly sample students to increase efficiency rather than assessing all of your students all of the time, but make sure that you obtain enough data to trust your conclusions. Alternatively, you can randomly sample artifacts of student work for evaluating student performance. Whatever your method for assessment, we ask that you report not only how and why the sample was selected, but also provide justification for the representativeness of the population of students in your program.

Are scoring rubrics recommended for assessing student learning outcomes?
Many faculty members use rubrics to grade, provide feedback, and evaluate student performance and skills. Rubrics can be designed to clarify criteria and standards for evaluating student work; they can indicate the differences between excellent, good, average, and poor work (or performance) on each criteria; they can ensure that evaluations are consistent and reliable, and can help students and faculty be clear on what is expected for excellence. So, yes, we recommend the use of rubrics, where applicable. Furthermore, we recommend that program faculty develop a consensus for developing and implementing rubrics to determine whether students meet specific learning outcomes.

Can course grades be used for assessment reporting?
Although grades measure students' cumulative performance in a course, there are significant shortcomings for relying on them for evaluating SLOs in a program. In particular, grading is often approached differently by individual faculty members teaching different sections of the same course. That is, the tools and standards for what qualifies excellent, average, and poor performance vary by instructor and section. Grades are also composed of many activities that are not directly related to student learning, such as attendance and participation. Moreover, relying solely on grades makes it difficult for programs to examine in detail the performance of their students on individual learning outcomes. Because these factors can reduce measurement reliability and validity, grades are not recommended for measuring whether and to what extent students achieve program learning outcomes.

When are all SLOs expected to be assessed in the two-year period?
For the two-year period, programs should cycle through the following steps at least once for each SLO in their plan:

1) Assess student performance
2) Propose improvements based on assessment data
3) Assess student performance again to see if the proposed changes had an impact.

Thus SLOs should be assessed as frequently as programs deem appropriate, as long as they are comparing assessment data across two points in time and making improvements, rather than merely describing student performance in their program.

Should rubrics and assignments used to assess student learning be uploaded into Sharepoint?

It is good practice to keep records of the various assessment methods and techniques for evaluating student learning. Because SharePoint provides a digital space for keeping various documents, we recommend attaching rubrics and assignment descriptions to your assessment plan.

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Should a minimum of 3 SLOs be assessed every year or every two-year period?
OAA requires every plan to identify at least 3 SLOS in their plan in a two-year period.

In that two-year period, every SLO should cycle through the following steps at least once:

1) Assess student performance
2) Propose improvements based on assessment data
3) Assess student performance again to see if the proposed changes had an impact.

Thus, SLOs should be assessed as frequently as programs deem appropriate, as long as they are comparing assessment data across two points in time and making improvements, rather than merely describing student performance in their program.

How frequently should SLOs be assessed in the two-year period?
Program assessment coordinators have the discretion to determine how frequently they choose to assess the SLOs in their plan during the two-year period – as long as they cycle through the following steps for each SLO in their plan at least once:

1) Assess student performance
2) Propose improvements based on assessment data
3) Assess student performance again to see if the proposed changes had an impact.

Thus, SLOs should be assessed as frequently as programs deem appropriate, as long as they are comparing assessment data across two points in time and making improvements, rather than merely describing student performance in their program.

Where should SLOs be assessed in the curriculum? In required courses or in all courses?
SLOs should be assessed wherever the program coordinators deem appropriate in the curriculum.

The OAA does not have strict rules about this. Our recommendation is that coordinators study the curriculum (as a whole) and think about where and how often their program should collect assessment data to have an adequate (or representative) description of student performance on your plan's SLOs. In addition, programs should make these determinations based on whether it will help identify where to best make improvements.

Some programs rely on assessing in courses that are required of program majors, while others simply focus on all upper division courses. The assessment strategy really depends on how your program is structured.

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Can we assess 2 SLOs one year and 3 SLOs the next?
Programs need to assess every SLO in their plan at least twice in a two-year period to make comparisons and examine whether improvement plans had an impact on student learning. Our minimum requirement is that every assessment plan includes at least 3 SLOs for the two-year period.

In that two-year period, every SLO should cycle through the following steps at least once:

1) Assess student performance
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Thus SLOs should be assessed as frequently as programs deem appropriate, as long as they are comparing assessment data across two points in time and making improvements, rather than merely describing student performance in their program.

Can assessment plans include the same measure or instrument for distinct SLOs?
Yes, it is acceptable to use the same assessment measure/instrument for different learning outcomes as long as there is a direct connection to the outcome being examined.

Are we expected to assess teach out legacy institution programs or programs scheduled to discontinue in 2019?
For institutional purposes, you will not be expected to collect SLO data for legacy institution programs or programs scheduled to discontinue in 2019; however, these data may be needed for college or program accreditations. It's important that colleges and programs make this distinction to determine whether and how they should continue to collect legacy institution or teach out program SLO data.

What is SharePoint?
SharePoint is a browser-based collaboration platform which houses the system that will be utilized to create and submit assessment plans for all academic programs within UTRGV.

How can I gain access to SharePoint?
If you have not yet received an email with an access link, reach out to us. SharePoint works seamlessly with your UTRGV email account which means you will use the same credentials to log-in to the system.

Who can I contact for technical assistance?
Contact us at assessment@utrgv.edu or reach out to any of the Planning and Assessment Coordinators listed on the contacts page, we will be more than happy to help!