QuickGuide: Undergraduate Program Assessment

The Basics: Outcomes Assessment for Undergraduate Programs

- Establish clear **learning outcomes** appropriate for the degree
- **Map** your learning outcomes onto your course of study to identify where knowledge or skills are introduced, which courses reinforce or develop them, and in which courses students will demonstrate mastery or advanced ability.
- Identify where **assessment** will take place:

-Capstone Courses	-Committee evaluation of a project, portfolio, or performance
-Advanced Courses	
-Standardized Exams	-Other points of interest suggested by your curriculum map

- Gather assessment data/evidence of learning outcomes achievement

Collecting Direct Evidence: Direct evidence is produced by evaluating student work or performance, and should be gathered for all learning outcomes on an ongoing basis. Gather evidence of learning that facilitates program *improvement* by identifying strengths and weaknesses (i.e., *not* just pass/fail data).

Quantitative Direct Evidence:
- Use a **rubric** that scores each outcome individually (create a rubric that makes sense for your program)
- Use exam or assignment scores (where the score measures only *one* learning outcome)

Qualitative Direct Evidence:
- Collect faculty comments and observations about strengths and weaknesses of student performance for each outcome (requires analysis of comments)

Setting Benchmarks and Targets:
- Set an appropriate benchmark for the *minimum* acceptable (passing) score or result for each outcome being assessed throughout the course of study
- Set a **target** of the percent of students that should meet the *minimum* benchmarks at each point of assessment
- Set a **second** target of the percent of students you would like to see achieve the *highest* possible score or result

Creating Action Plans:
- Create an "action plan" to respond programmatically to any troubling patterns or shortfalls; action plans can include changes to curriculum, the course of study, policy, advising practices, pedagogy, professional development, or even changes to learning outcomes or the assessment plan.

Optional but *Recommended*: Also gathering *indirect* evidence, such as exit interviews, student surveys, alumni surveys, focus groups, etc.

Program Assessment	
Outcomes Assessment	Program Evaluation
• Assessment of student learning goals and outcomes • Required for accreditation • Focus on student learning: How well are students learning what is intended? • Continuous improvement of student learning • Requires **direct evidence** of student learning for each learning outcome • Uses indirect evidence of student learning to provide context and help interpret direct evidence	• **Incorporates outcomes assessment results,** and assessment of other, non-academic, program goals and outcomes • Required for program review • Focus on the program: goals, curriculum, policies, professional development, big picture outcomes (job placement, student satisfaction, etc.) • Continuous improvement of the program • Uses other **indirect** and **supporting** evidence to evaluate strategic goals and program efficacy, and to interpret the results of outcomes assessment

The Purpose of Assessment

The goal is to evaluate and respond to strengths and weaknesses of the *program* in light of program learning outcomes and strategic goals. Assessment is a process for program improvement.

Gathering Evidence

Some kind of *direct* evidence must be collected for learning outcomes. Direct evidence is frequently quantitative, but it can also be qualitative.

✓ A rubric is often the most convenient way to collect assessment data.

✓ The rubric can be used for student assessment as well, but it doesn't have to be. The goal is to collect program data. It is often easier to keep grading and outcomes assessment processes separate, since grading is usually based on multiple factors.

✓ Exam scores or assignment grades can be used as assessment evidence if the scores measure only one learning outcome. For example, if an exam is broken into sections, each corresponding to a particular learning outcome, then the results from each section are usable assessment data.

✓ Qualitative evidence, such as faculty notes or observations (if clearly connected to learning outcomes) from student work (such as a project, portfolio, or performance), does count. However, to use faculty comments as assessment data, someone must analyze them, note any patterns, and write a summary of findings.

Messy Measures

Many programs want to track course or exam pass/fail data, GPA data, course grades, or the results of standardized or national exams, and frequently include this kind of data in their

program assessment plan (and should, if faculty value these things). These measures play a vital role in program evaluation, however they are **problematic as outcomes assessment data** because they represent combinations of learning outcomes and behaviors, and don't allow faculty to judge and document *specific* strengths and weaknesses in a systematic way. Include these measures if they are useful to your program, but **you should *also* include some direct measure for each learning outcome.**

Assessing throughout the Course of Study
Summative assessment data gathered from the end of each student's course of study (such as capstone courses) shows the programs overall successes or failures, but faculty may want to know more about how students got there. Formative assessment data can be gathered from coursework early on to track how students learn and acquire skills over the course of the program, and at what points (and how) they acquire the knowledge, skills, habits of mind and ways of being that the program values. Such data can help programs make systemic improvements and be more intentional about the learning and experiences they want for their students. Formative assessment also allows programs to track how a cohort of students is doing early on, and to intervene if necessary to keep the cohort on track to achieve the program's learning outcomes.

Indirect Evidence
Direct evidence is greatly enhanced by "triangulating" with indirect evidence, such as exit interviews, alumni surveys, student surveys, focus groups, employer surveys, or student self-evaluations and reflections.

> *Indirect Evidence of Learning:* Students can also be asked to self-report what they believe they learned or what skills they developed through the program. Indirect evidence can help faculty to interpret and contextualize other assessment data (but doesn't take the place of direct evidence for learning outcomes).

> *Indirect Program Evidence:* Programs may wish to survey students to gather data about their career goals or experiences in the program. Students and alumni can be asked to assess the quality of the program, or of the support and advising they received, as well as how they believe the program contributed to accomplishing their career goals. Focus groups, exit interviews, and surveys are good examples of indirect evidence.

Action Plans
Action plans are *programmatic* responses to patterns or shortfalls revealed in assessment data. Action plans can include changes to curriculum, policy, advising practices, pedagogy, or professional development. Action plans include a statement of the intended changes, a timeline, and a plan for evaluating if the change was successful.

Ongoing Assessment

Outcomes assessment data should be gathered on an *ongoing* basis. At minimum, programs should gather data for at least one major outcome (or group of outcomes) per year on a rotating basis, with all program outcomes assessed within a five-year period.

Writing Goals & Outcomes

Weave asks programs to enter their data according to Goals and Outcomes. Goals are general and aspirational, while outcomes are specific and measurable iterations of goals. One goal may have several outcomes associated with it. Outcomes should use specific **verbs** that detail the activities students will do to demonstrate learning or proficiency ("outcomes" should "come out" somewhere- they specify what the student will do). Below is an example of Goals followed by Outcomes.

Program Goals:

Students in the Folklore Studies program will:

- **(Folklore)** Study informal, traditional, and expressive aspects of human culture, such as storytelling, mythmaking, ritual, folk art, dance, folk music, memes, and urban legends.
- **(Theory)** Learn about and apply folkloristic theoretical perspectives to understand cultural, historical, social, and psychological dimensions of human activity.
- **(Fieldwork)** Use ethnographic fieldwork methods to study how people invent, transform, and derive meaning from tradition.
- **(Ethics)** Understand and appropriately navigate the ethical dimensions of ethnography and fieldwork.
- **(Ethnography)** Practice producing and presenting ethnography in oral, print, film, and digital mediums.
- **(Community)** Understand relationships between identity, community, and expressive traditions.
- **(Culture)** Cultivate a critical understanding of their own and other cultures.

Program Learning Outcomes

Students graduating from the Folklore Program will be able to:

PLO1: **Identify, describe, and explain** several common forms of folklore and folklife. [Folklore]

PLO2: Accurately **explain** and **discuss** the uses and limits of folkloristic approaches, including structuralism, functionalism, structural functionalism, and performance theory. [Theory]

PLO3: Accurately **describe** the ideas and impact of historical figures that influenced the field of Folklore Studies. [Theory]

PLO4: **Plan** and **carry out** an ethnographic research project, including choosing an appropriate research subject, engaging in participant observation, interviewing informants, and keeping field notes. [Fieldwork]

PLO5: Explicitly and responsibly **reflect** on the ethical dimensions of the student's ethnographic research projects and ethnographic writing in field notes and a reflective essay. [Ethics]

PLO6: **Compose** and **present** effective ethnographic texts in print, film, or digital formats. [Ethnography]

PLO7: Effectively **apply** folkloristic theories and perspectives to **create** arguments about the meaning and significance of particular cultural traditions. [Theory]

PLO8: **Explain** and **explore** specific examples of the role of folklore and tradition in shaping identity, belief, and community. [Community]

PLO9: **Contextualize** and **explain** the social significances of specific traditional, informal, or expressive cultural activities from several different cultures. [Culture]

The Assessment Plan

Once learning outcomes are established, the program needs to establish an Assessment Plan that lays out how data will be gathered. The most essential assessment plans gather data from direct evaluations of student performance in capstone or senior level courses. Your assessment plan should specify your program's learning goals and outcomes, where each learning outcome will be assessed, what your benchmarks and targets are for each outcome, and when and how data will be collected, and who will be responsible at each stage in the process.

Example #1
Final projects from a program's capstone course are evaluated using a developmental program rubric that lists 5 program learning outcomes. The program rubric is separate from the grading rubric the instructor uses. Each outcome is rated on a scale of 1-5.

> *1= Not present*
> *2= Beginning competency*
> *3= Developing competency*
> *4= Advanced competency*
> *5= Expert competency*

Faculty are well-normed, having defined each level carefully and achieved consistency in how they interpret and apply the rubric. They report to the program how many students scored at each level (and note any enrolled students that were not scored, e.g., did not complete the final project). The program has established a score of 4 as the **benchmark**, the minimally acceptable score for a graduating senior for each outcome. Their **target** is for 80% of all capstone students to score a 4 or better.

Example #2
A science program has an advanced course, offered every semester, that all majors are required to take. Both the midterm exam and the final exam have specific essay questions, worth 50pts each, aimed at assessing two of the program's essential PLOs, student's mastery of disciplinary knowledge and ability to apply scientific method to answer real-world questions. Graders are provided with clear guidelines for grading, giving all essay responses that meet the minimum benchmark a score of 30/50pts or higher, regardless of other factors. The instructors report the scores for these two questions to the department, but not the overall exam score (which also tests for other course learning outcomes). Because these outcomes are considered essential for all majors in the program, their target is for 90% of all students to score at least 30pts on these exam questions.

Select Bibliography

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