

# Information about Assessment

## For New Chairs & Program Directors

Departments, programs, and DLBs have a number of assessment-related obligations often inherited by people stepping into leadership roles.

These obligations stem from **campus accreditation** requirements from the Higher Learning Commission (as well as program requirements for individually accredited programs), from the **Board of Regents** policy on [Assessment of Student Learning](#), and from **UWM policies** established through faculty governance by the APCC.

### What is Assessment?

Assessment is the collection of evidence about student learning used by faculty to evaluate how well a program's (or a course's) learning outcomes are being met by students, for the purposes of program (or course) improvement.

It differs from grading in that the only thing measured is learning (apart from participation, attendance, etc), and data for each learning outcome must be collected and evaluated separately (while grades frequently evaluate multiple outcomes together, or even may weigh some outcomes more than others).

Assessment, when done well, allows faculty and programs to see *patterns of strength and weakness in learning across different learning outcomes*, and to make changes accordingly.

### What are the obligations?

**Program Assessment:** Each degree program, both graduate and undergraduate, must submit *annual* assessment data (including some brief reflection/narrative) to the campus assessment coordinator. At this point, all degree programs should already have an assessment plan in place, but it is important to ensure that those plans continue to be carried out and that data reporting is completed each year. Program assessment data is always due on Nov 1 for the *previous* academic year. Data for at least one program outcome must be reported each year, with all program learning outcomes being assessed within a five-year period.

[QuickGuide: Undergraduate Program Assessment](#)

[QuickGuide: Graduate Program Assessment](#)

**GER Assessment:** All courses carrying GER credit must be assessed on a regular and ongoing basis. GER assessment data (including brief reflection/narrative) collected in any given year must be submitted to the campus assessment coordinator. Timelines for GER data collection and submission vary

by department and program, and frequently even by *instructor*. See the Guide for Departments linked below.

[Guide for Departments: GER Assessment](#)

[Guide for Instructors: GER Assessment](#) (a handout that can be given to GER instructors)

[GER Assessment Best Practices](#)

[Who takes care of these obligations?](#)

This varies.

Organizing and overseeing assessment data collection and data reporting is often undertaken by a wide range of individuals, depending upon how particular departments or even schools have organized it:

- Department chairs
- undergraduate or graduate program directors
- A department assessment coordinator
- A department assessment committee
- Associate deans (in some instances)

The actual collection of assessment data **can only be done by the faculty, instructors, and even graduate students who are directly involved in teaching and evaluating students.**

[Who Evaluates your Assessment Data?](#)

You do.

Program assessment data should be discussed by program faculty/instructors as a group, who collectively determine how to interpret and respond to that assessment data, and what, if any, changes to the program or to courses should be made to improve learning, according to whatever processes or committees your department or program has established.

For large GER programs with a shared curriculum it also makes sense for directors or faculty/instructors as a group to interpret data and make adjustments for the whole program accordingly. However, the vast majority of GER courses on our campus are taught by individual faculty or instructors who have sole control over course content.

In those instances, **reflecting on and responding to GER assessment data is best done by the instructor of the course**, since only they understand the context well enough to interpret the data correctly, and only they can make changes to course content to improve learning.

### What do our accreditors look for?

HLC reviewers, and the APCC when it reviews programs and GER courses, is specifically looking for:

- Evidence that a good assessment plan is in place and being carried out regularly
- Evidence that faculty and other instructional staff are widely involved in implementing that plan, collecting data, discussing and interpreting data, and responding to it appropriately.
- Evidence that programs and GER course instructors are actively using assessment as part of a process of measuring and reflecting on student learning for continuous program or course improvement.

Data that is shallow, or never reveals *patterns* of strength or weakness across learning outcomes, even over a period of years, can be a red flag for reviewers that the program does not have an effective assessment plan or is not effectively using it.

**For accreditation, the goal is not simply to “prove” that students learned “enough”, but rather to see evidence of a *process* that allows programs to be responsive to emerging and shifting patterns in student learning over time.**

### What is reported?

To gather evidence of the above, this is what you (or GER instructors) will report using our Qualtrics reporting forms:

- Which program or GER outcomes are assessed in a given period for the program or GER course
- How they are assessed (using a rubric, assignment grades, committee evaluation, etc)
- The N (sample size, number of students evaluated), and the #/% of students at each performance level for each outcome being assessed during that period
- Faculty/instructor interpretation of the data, accounting for context (is all going well? Were any patterns of concern noted?)
- Any action plans (changes to curriculum, policy, or course content) resulting from the assessment data

### Where is Assessment Data reported?

Links to the Qualtrics reporting forms for both Program Assessment and GER assessment can be found here:

<https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/assessment-of-student-learning/reporting-assessment-data/>

### Who can I go to with questions, or to get help?

The campus assessment coordinator, Adam Andrews ([andrewsa@uwm.edu](mailto:andrewsa@uwm.edu)), can answer most questions you may have about assessment in your department or program, and can provide you with historical data or information that has been reported previously.

The general contact email address for the whole assessment team is:

[assessment-uwm@uwm.edu](mailto:assessment-uwm@uwm.edu).

**UWM's Assessment Website** contains an array of documents, examples, and links that you may find helpful, for both Program Assessment and GER Assessment:

<http://uwm.edu/assessment>

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