College of Coastal Georgia

Program Assessment Planning Guide

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Updated September 2016

Contents

Introduction

The College of Coastal Georgia has an ongoing review process based on learning outcomes for all baccalaureate and career associate degree programs, as well as select associate degree for transfer programs. Outcomes specific to educational programs are identified through both internal and external institutional effectiveness processes.

The purpose of assessment of academic learning outcomes at the program level at the College of Coastal Georgia is to improve students' learning. School Deans and faculty evaluate assessment results to identify ways to improve the educational environment and enhance student success.

Implementing the Outcomes Assessment Process requires a plan that explains what will be measured, how it will be measured when the assessment will occur, who is responsible for assessment activities, and how the assessment information will be used.

Scope of Guide

This assessment guide is designed to assist faculty and administrators with the process of developing and/or revising expected learning outcomes and methods for assessing those outcomes in their degree programs. Goals of the guide are:

- Develop and/or revise the expected student learning outcomes for a degree program;
- Establish benchmarks or thresholds for student performance in relation to those student learning outcomes;
- Select appropriate assessment methods for each student learning outcome;
- Create and/or update an assessment plan that outlines the specific methods that will be used to assess the expected student learning outcomes for a degree program;
- Identify ways that degree programs will use assessment data to make improvements to student learning in that program;

Nine Principles of Assessment

Assessment at the College of Coastal Georgia is guided by the Nine *Principles of Assessment*[1] that were developed by a task force from the American Association for Higher Education (Alexander W. Astin; Trudy W. Banta; K. Patricia Cross; Elain El-Khawas; Peter T. Ewell; Pat Hutchings; Theodore J. Marchese, Kay M. McClenney; Marcia Mentkowski, Margaret A. Miller; E. Thomas Moran; and Barbara D. Wright).

The nine principles include:

- The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
- Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
- Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
- Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
- Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
- Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
- Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people care about.
- Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
- Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

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[1] American Association for Higher Education, 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning, 1996; http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/june97/ameri1.htm.

Key Definitions

- **Assessment** refers to a continuous process instituted to understand and improve student learning. While academic units may find alternative pathways to arrive at this goal, this process needs to begin with an articulation of educational goals for all programs and courses. These goals should be expressed as measurable objectives followed by the selection of reliable and valid methods and measures. After collecting, interpreting, and sharing findings, the aim is to use these learning outcomes to better understand how and what students learn, how well students are meeting expected objectives, as well as to develop strategies to improve the teaching and learning processes.

- **Student Learning Outcome (SLO)** – An outcome that describes what a student is expected to learn as a result of participating in academic activities or experiences at the College. SLO focus on knowledge gained, skills and abilities acquired or demonstrated, and attitudes or values changed.

- **General Education Outcomes** -- Similar to the definition of the Student Learning Outcome where the program evaluated is the associate of arts degree.

- **Assessment method and instrument** – The assessment method is the general assessment approach used to measure whether students have achieved an outcome, such as a test or an assignment.

- **Program** -- The rational, major assumptions, objectives, learning outcomes, experiences and educational practices that define the content of instruction leading to one or a cluster of related credentials.

- **Direct Assessment** -- Direct measures of student learning require student to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself. Objective tests, essays, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion.

- **Indirect Assessment --** Indirect assessment asks students to reflect on their learning rather than to demonstrate it. Techniques include external reviewers, student surveys, exit interviews, alumni surveys, employer surveys, and curriculum and syllabus analysis.

Program Purpose/Mission and Expected Outcomes

In an effort to assist programs in properly and effectively engaging in assessment practices, it is important to begin the process by defining the program and its expected outcomes. This includes a sound program mission and goals; identification of educational objectives for each goal; and clearly stated student learning outcomes.

Purpose/Mission

The values and philosophy of the program, a vision of what the program is supposed to do. A purpose/mission statement might include a brief history and philosophy of the program, the type of students to be served, the academic environment and primary focus of the curriculum, faculty roles, the contributions to and connections with the community, the role of research, and a stated commitment to diversity and nondiscrimination.[2] A program mission statement should be consistent with the College of Coastal Georgia's mission statement.

Example of Purpose/Mission Statement

The purpose of the Clinical Laboratory Technology program is to prepare individuals to perform laboratory procedures in clinical chemistry, hematology, microbiology, immunohematology, urinalysis, and immunodiagnostics.

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[2] Allen, Mary; Noel, Richard, C.; Rienzi, Beth, M.; and McMillin, Daniel, J. (2002). Outcomes Assessment Handbook. California State University, Institute for Teaching and Learning, Long Beach, CA.

Program Goals

Goals are broad statements that describe the long-term program targets or directions of development. They state in broad terms what the program wants to accomplish (regarding student outcomes) or to become over the next several years.[3]

Review any existing goal or outcome statements such as those from catalog descriptions, program review reports, and external agencies; e.g., Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of business.

Instructions for Writing Program Goals

Once you have reached an understanding of the mission of the program and the faculty members are in agreement on what the program is trying to accomplish, you can start writing the program goals. The following are some guidelines[4] for writing program goals:

- Identify **three or more goals** that are important (i.e., strongly related to the mission and that will help to achieve the vision).
- Goal statements should describe the expected performance of the student or specific behaviors expected from graduates of the program.
- Don't identify too many goals, particularly when first starting out.

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[3] Program Assessment Handbook: Guidelines for Planning and Implementing Quality Enhancing Efforts of Program and Student Learning Outcomes. University of Central Florida (June 2008 edition).
[4] Program Assessment Handbook: Guidelines for Planning and Implementing Quality Enhancing Efforts of Program and Student Learning Outcomes. University of Central Florida (June 2008 edition).

Example of Program Goal

- To prepare students for graduate school.
- To have students graduate from the program with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in hotel management.
- To prepare students to be successful in nursing careers.

Program Outcomes

List the program's outcomes and describe how they contribute to building a strong and distinctive program (broadly stated, meaningful, achievable and assessable), providing a sound framework for determining the more specific educational objectives of a program consistent with the program's mission and that of the College.

Example of Program Outcomes

BS Psychology

- Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.
- Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
- Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes
- Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues
- Students will value empirical evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a science

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Instructions for Writing Student Learning Outcomes[5]

Creating student learning outcomes for an educational program is a process. Some programs have found the following steps to be helpful:

Step 1

Start by having a faculty/staff meeting and brainstorm about what an ideal graduate would know; consult the website for your professional/disciplinary organization – many of them are developing student learning outcomes for degree or service programs at various levels.

Step 2 Agree on the first draft of a list of outcomes, understanding that they will be revised several times before becoming firm (or definitive) and that they will change over time for currency in the discipline or service area and changing needs and characteristics of students.

Step 3

List the student learning outcomes on every syllabus for the required courses in your degree program (or programs within your student service area), indicating which of them will be covered in each particular course (or service program).

Step 4

Gather feedback from students in each course or service program about how well they perceive that student learning outcomes were addressed.

Step 5

Assess student learning by designing assignments specifically geared to measure achievement of each of the outcomes that are designated for each course, degree program, or service area.

Step 6

In light of this data, meet (with faculty, staff, and students) at the end of each semester

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[5] Collected from various academic learning assessment sources.

or academic year and revise the list of outcomes, teaching methods, curriculum, and/or program.

Step 7

Repeat the above steps regularly and as needed to improve student learning.

Good Practices[6] for Successful Program Outcomes

- Publicize program outcomes in the catalog, on the web, on syllabi, annual report, brochures, etc.
- Use program outcomes to guide course and curriculum planning, so students experience a cohesive curriculum
- Use program outcomes to shape assessment efforts and faculty/staff conversations surrounding student learning
- Collaboratively develop program outcomes; discuss and collectively accept program outcomes
- Student input on achievement of outcomes

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[6] Tools & Techniques for Program Improvement: Handbook for Program Review & Assessment of Student Learning. [PDF] Office of Institutional Assessment, Research, and Testing. Western Washington University (2006).

Alignment of Program Goals and Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes

The knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes or dispositions you expect students to acquire in your program. Student learning outcomes should be stated, realistic and achievable. They should meaningfully define the related goal, and, where possible, indicate desired level of attainment. Finally, student learning outcomes should be assessable.

Goals should reflect the general knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will develop during the time they are taking the program's courses. **Outcomes** should state what students will do or produce to demonstrate their learning within a specific time frame.

Example of program goal and outcome alignment

Goal 1: Students should learn how to engage in critical, evidence-based thinking.

- **Outcome 1.1**: Students will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of empirical research and theories in psychology.
- **Outcome 1.2**: Students will locate, critically examine, and evaluate primary literature in psychology.

Program Outcomes Worksheet

This worksheet[7] may help you and others in your department develop program outcomes from the goals you have identified. Working together, faculty members complete Table 1. Discuss the responses and try to reach consensus on desired

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[7] Program-Based Review and Assessment: Tools and Techniques for Program Improvement. Office of Academic Planning and Assessment. University of Massachusetts Amherst (2001).

outcomes. Remember – an outcome is the specific learning behavior that the student should demonstrate in the context of achieving the goal.

Here are a few questions to consider:

- What will graduates of our program know, be able to do, or value?
- What specific observable or measurable actions should our students do to demonstrate they have met the outcome?
- How will we know if our students achieved the outcome?

Table 1: Program Goal-Outcome Alignment Worksheet

Program Goal	Program Outcome
1.	a) b) c)
2.	a) b) c)
3.	a) b) c)
4.	a) b) c)

Alignment of Program and Learning Outcomes

Curriculum and courses required by the program should be designed to meet program outcomes.   Students will not demonstrate the desired learning outcomes if your program components have not provided sufficient opportunity to develop them during coursework and related experiences. According to Mary Allen, "curricula should be structured to introduce key learning opportunities early and to reinforce this learning throughout."[8]

A curriculum map is a graphic that illustrates how courses in the curriculum for an instructional program contribute to the overall learning outcomes of that program. It can visually indicate where specific learning takes place and at what level of engagement within the structure of the instructional program.[9]

Examination of a curriculum map can provide the following information:

- Identify courses where specific program SLOs are likely to be achieved.
- Identify courses that include an assignment or activity that might be used as an
- embedded assessment for a program level SLO.
- Identify courses in which the course learning outcomes are not related to any program learning outcomes.
- Identify gaps in the curriculum. An example of a gap would be the identification of a program SLO that does not appear to be addressed as well as might be desired (e.g., a program might identify writing as an SLO but only one or two courses include SLOs related to the quality of writing, and none of these do more than introduce writing skill).
- Suggest questions about the need for sequencing courses within the curriculum or modifying existing sequences of courses.

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[8] Allen, Mary; Noel, Richard, C.; Rienzi, Beth, M.; and McMillin, Daniel, J. (2002). Outcomes Assessment Handbook. California State University, Institute for Teaching and Learning, Long Beach, CA.
[9] Derived from the University of West Florida, Center on Teaching, Learning & Assessment, Skyline, and Bakersfield Colleges (2009).

- Identify how different courses serve different purposes in achieving student learning within a program (per the program SLOs).

The stages followed in the "courses-to-program" curriculum mapping process are[10]:

- Collect and review course outlines.
  These now ask for information on course aims, articulation with other courses and teaching strategies, which assist the mapping process.
- Develop mapping tool.
  This could be an Excel spreadsheet that uses student activities as the key focus for each course, and then correlates student learning outcomes, assessment tasks, and graduate attributes.
- Preliminary mapping.
  Selected core courses in each undergraduate program are mapped into the Excel tool.
- Meeting of small groups of academic staff to discuss the adequacy of preliminary maps, and the correlation of Handbook entries, course outlines, and the maps.
- Whole program mapping.
  Correlating course student activities and outcome maps across whole programs.
- Review program maps in the light of CCGA graduate attributes.
- Meetings with staff to assess process and implications for course structures and teaching strategies.

Course-to-program curriculum maps for baccalaureate degree programs are located at **http://www.ccga.edu/OIE/InstitutionalEffectiveness.asp** under the subheading *Educational Programs*.

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[10] Curriculum Design, Mapping Program Learning Outcomes, University of New South Wales (2011).

Selecting and Implementing Assessment Approaches

Generally speaking, there are two types of assessment methods.

Direct assessment methods are measures of student learning that require students to display their actual knowledge and skills (rather than report what they think their knowledge and skills are). Because direct assessment taps into students' actual learning (rather than perceptions or learning) it is often seen as the preferred type of assessment. As such, degree program faculty and administrators should look at incorporating some direct assessment methods into their assessment plans

Indirect assessment methods ask students to reflect on their learning rather than to actually demonstrate it. Indirect assessment methods can often provide very useful information regarding student learning in a degree program. Both direct and indirect assessment methods can provide useful insight into students' experiences and learning in a program. Direct and indirect assessment methods each have unique advantages and disadvantages regarding the type of data and information they can provide. As such, many degree program faculty and administrators choose to incorporate both types of assessment into an assessment plan.

Select Assessment Methods[11]

- Capstone Courses: could be a senior seminar or designated assessment course. Program learning outcomes can be integrated into assignments.

- Case Studies: involve a systematic inquiry into a specific phenomenon, e.g. individual, event, program, or process. Data are collected via multiple methods often utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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[11] Allen, Mary; Noel, Richard, C.; Rienzi, Beth, M.; and McMillin, Daniel, J. (2002). Outcomes Assessment Handbook. California State University, Institute for Teaching and Learning, Long Beach, CA.

- <u>Classroom Assessment</u>: is often designed for individual faculty who wish to improve their teaching of a specific course. Data collected can be analyzed to assess student learning outcomes for a program.

- <u>Collective Portfolios</u>: Faculty assembles samples of student work from various classes and use the "collective" to assess specific program learning outcomes. Portfolios can be assessed by using scoring rubrics; expectations should be clarified before portfolios are examined.

- <u>Embedded Questions to Assignments</u>: Questions related to program learning outcomes are embedded within course exams. For example, all sections of "research methods" could include a question or set of questions relating to your program learning outcomes. Faculty score and grade the exams as usual and then copy exam questions that are linked to the program learning outcomes for analysis. The findings are reported in the aggregate.

- <u>Exit Interviews</u>: Students leaving the university, generally graduating students are interviewed or surveyed to obtain feedback. Data obtained can address strengths and weaknesses of an institution or program and/or assess relevant concepts, theories or skills.

- <u>Focus Groups</u>: are a series of carefully planned discussions among homogeneous groups of 6-10 respondents who are asked a carefully constructed series of open-ended questions about their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. The session is typically recorded and later the recording is transcribed for analysis. The data is studied for major issues and reoccurring themes along with representative comments.

- <u>Interviews</u>: are conversations or direct questioning with an individual or group of people. The interviews can be conducted in person or on the telephone.

- <u>Locally developed essay questions</u>: Faculty develop essay questions that align with program learning outcomes. Performance expectations should be made explicit prior to obtaining results.

- <u>Locally developed exams with objective questions</u>: Faculty create an objective exam that is aligned with program learning outcomes. Performance expectations should be made explicit prior to obtaining results.

- <u>Matrices</u>: are used to summarize the relationship between program objectives and courses, course assignments, or course syllabus objectives to examine congruence and to ensure that all objectives have been sufficiently structured into the curriculum.

- <u>Observations</u>: can be of any social phenomenon, such as student presentations, students working in the library, or interactions at student help desks. Observations can be recorded as a narrative or in a highly structured format, such as a checklist, and they should be focused on specific program objectives.

- <u>Reflective Essays</u>: generally, are brief (five to ten minute) essays on topics related to identified learning outcomes, although they may be longer when assigned as homework. Students are asked to reflect on a selected issue. Content analysis is used to analyze results.

- <u>Scoring Rubrics</u>: can be used to holistically score any product or performance such as essays, portfolios, recitals, oral exams, research reports, etc. A detailed scoring rubric that delineates criteria used to discriminate among levels is developed and used for scoring. Two raters are used to review each product and a third rater is employed to resolve discrepancies.

- Standardized Achievement and Self-Report Tests: Select standardized tests that are aligned to your specific program learning outcomes. Score, compile and analyze data. Develop local norms to track achievement across time and use national norms to see how your students compare to those on other campuses.

- Surveys: are commonly used for open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions require respondents to answer the question from a provided list of responses. Typically, the list is a progressive scale ranging from low to high, or strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Analyzing Assessment Data

Form a small department-level committee to determine how the data will be analyzed, offering consistency of process, as well as review and implementation.

If you are utilizing multiple assessment instruments, review the results for related parts that directly address your program goals and educational objectives.

- Is there a relationship between the findings?
- Are they consistent, inconsistent or at opposite ends of the spectrum?

Use the data to pinpoint the areas in your program that are achieving program goals and also areas of your program that warrant change for improvement.

Identify the means by which information that results from assessment can be used for decision-making, strategic planning, program evaluation and program improvement.

- How, exactly, will your data be used to help with program planning and improvement?
- Will your program form a committee to review assessment findings, and make recommendations for change or improvement promptly?
- Will your entire department convene to discuss assessment results and program changes?
- Who will make formal recommendations for curricular or other changes-the chair/head? The committee?

Analysis of assessment data should help departments identify the following:

- What students are learning in relation to each student learning outcome
- How well students are learning the material that relates to those outcomes
- How well the selected assessment method(s) measure each student learning outcome
- Areas for more focused assessment
- Ways that learning outcomes may need to be revised
- Areas that may need to be investigated in the next phase of assessment – the Improving Phase

Communication of Results

Assessment plans and reports are posted on the College's Institutional Effectiveness Intranet web page – **http://www.ccga.edu/oie/InstitutionalEffectiveness.asp**. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness prepares reports for the President's Cabinet, Committee on Academic Assessment, and Deans' Council summarizing the successes, challenges, and plans for improvement of programs.

Using Evidence to Improve Student Learning Outcomes

It is recommended that programs set aside one faculty meeting a semester to discuss the degree program's student learning outcomes and assessment plan as one of the easiest ways to make the improvements phase a routine departmental function. This meeting should focus on the degree program's student learning outcomes, assessment data, and improvements that can be made. It is not necessary to wait to schedule this meeting until the assessment plan and data are "perfect". Assessment is a work in progress, and any meeting held should be beneficial. Some questions that need consideration at this juncture follow.

- Do the objectives and findings define as well as answer the questions that are important to understanding and enhancing student learning?
- Are faculty and students motivated to participate in the assessment process? If not, why not?
- Has thought been given to the use of benchmarks based on comparable student groups?
- Are there resources available to assist in areas of assessment that are found problematic?
- Is there adequate support from the university to allow for continued implementation and evaluation of the assessment plan?

Types of Assessment Changes

The following categories[12] are areas, within the academic environment, where changes may be implemented:

Changes to Assessment Plan

- revision of intended learning outcome statement(s)
- revision of measurement approaches
- collection of and analysis of additional data and information
- changes of data collection methods

Changes to Curriculum

- changes in pedagogical practices
- revision or enforcement of prerequisites
- revision of course sequence
- revision of course content
- addition of course(s)
- deletion of course(s)

Changes to Academic Processes

- modification of frequency or schedule of course offerings
- improvements of technology
- changes in personnel
- implement additional training
- other implemented or planned change
- revision of advising standards or processes
- revision of admission criteria
- revision or enforcement of prerequisites
- revision of course sequence

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[12] Program Assessment Handbook: Guidelines for Planning and Implementing Quality Enhancing Efforts of Program and Student Learning Outcomes. University of Central Florida (June 2008 edition).

- revision of course content

- addition of course(s)

- deletion of course(s)

Changes to Academic Processes

- modification of frequency or schedule of course offerings

- improvements of technology

- changes in personnel

- implement additional training

- other implemented or planned change

- revision of advising standards or processes

- revision of admission criteria

Educational Program Assessment Plan Template

The purpose of the Educational Program Assessment Plan template is to document the student learning outcomes and findings of assessments undertaken by academic programs to study their current curriculum and pedagogy in the interim years within the program review cycle. Findings will be used to make academic planning decisions, and to enhance the program's mission and purpose.

Elements of Educational Program Assessment Plan Template

Part I

- School
- Department
- Academic Year
- Report Submitted By
- Mission Statement (Concise articulation of the program's essential purpose)

Part 2

Program Student Learning Outcomes

- What should students be able to do with what they know as the result of their academic experience in the degree program?

(SLO) Assessment Measurement

- What methods will be used to determine if students have met the standards and performance criteria established?

Target

- What benchmarks or indicators of success are you using to determine if the outcome(s) has been satisfactorily met by the students?

Discussion of Findings

- What do the data that result from your assessment method(s) show about student learning relative to this outcome(s)?

Analyzing / Evaluation of Findings

- What was learned from the assessment findings?
- What do the assessment results convey about the student learning outcome?

Use of Results (Closing the Loop)

- How will findings be used to improve teaching and learning?
- If no changes are planned, please describe why no changes are needed.

As part of the assessment process, a practical assessment planning checklist (p. 27) is provided to ensure that key elements have been addressed and documented to ensure effective and efficient assessment.

Assessment Planning Checklist[13]

_____ Does the program have a stated mission that is consistent with the College of Coastal Georgia mission statement?

_____ Does the program have articulated general goals?

_____ Has the program defined specific program-level learning outcomes?

_____ Are the program components (courses, series of classes, related experiences) aligned with these learning outcomes?

_____ Has the program assessed any of the defined learning outcomes?

_____ If yes, are the methods used direct, indirect, or both?

Briefly describe the assessment instruments:

_____ If program-level learning outcomes assessment has taken place, have the data been reported back to the department/program?

If yes, briefly describe feedback mechanism:

_____ Has a departmental discussion of the data resulted in any program changes or improvement?

If yes, briefly describe.

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[13] Linda Bomstad, Professor Emerita of Philosophy, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, January 2006