

# Academic Program Review Guide

## For Units Reporting in 2018



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## **PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

Academic Program Review (APR) provides an opportunity for a program's faculty to make a systematic, comprehensive study of an academic program, and articulate the program's cumulative contributions to student learning. The faculty are able to use assessment findings to purposefully plan changes in curriculum, services, research, and pedagogy to reach intended outcomes or results. The primary purpose of this review is to analyze the current state of the program, and plan for improvements for student learning by engaging in critical review of the program, its elements, relevant institutional data, as well as the faculty and student experience. This systematic process can be used to determine or make recommendations for resource allocation or new resource requests.

APR is a multi-semester process in which an academic unit conducts a self-study and writes a report that is then reviewed by the provost's office, dean, college administrators, and a team of peer reviewers. During the self-study process, the academic unit identifies the mission, goals, and student learning outcomes for its degree programs. The unit, with help from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), uses a variety of data sources to measure whether goals and outcomes are being achieved. These results are used to create action plans for the ultimate purpose of strengthening the program and improving student learning and success. Once the self-study is completed, the unit writes an APR report, which is reviewed by a team of peer reviewers as well as the Associate Provosts for Undergraduate and Graduate Education, the dean, and OIRA staff.

The responsibility for program review belongs to the faculty under the direction of the chair/director or dean, depending on organizational structure. Units typically identify a team comprising program directors, the undergraduate chair, graduate chair, and key faculty members.

Most units are required to participate in APR every seven years. Time between reports should be spent making the recommended improvements or changes, and conducting ongoing learning assessment. Units are also encouraged to routinely discuss the educational goals, learning outcomes, and curriculum maps for their degree programs during the years between self-studies.

Academic program review reports are used in Mason's accreditation reporting to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Colleges (SACSCOC), and to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV).

### **Program Level Assessment**

Program level assessment focuses on what a program is doing, and how it is contributing to the learning, growth, and development of students as a group. A quality assessment plan reflects specific program goals, measurable student learning outcomes, and a well-articulated plan for timely implementation, strategic data collection, and analysis. Findings should then be used to inform, confirm, and support program level change and facilitate continuous program improvement.

Assessment helps programs:

- Discover through empirical evidence what students are learning
- Identify gaps in student learning
- Inform pedagogy by aligning best practices with learners' needs
- Make informed decisions about curriculum
- Demonstrate overall program effectiveness and showcase student learning

***Which programs participate in Academic Program Review?***

All undergraduate and graduate degree programs that are not covered by an external accreditation organization must participate in APR. This includes interdisciplinary programs. Certificate programs that meet certain criteria are also required to participate in APR.

### ***How does APR support institutional accreditation?***

George Mason University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). SACSCOC requires the assessment of institutional effectiveness as:

#### 3.3 Institutional Effectiveness<sup>1</sup>

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:

(Institutional Effectiveness)

- 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- 3.3.1.2 administrative support services
- 3.3.1.3 academic and student support services
- 3.3.1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate
- 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate

SACSCOC expects that the institution engages in “ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission” (Principle 2.5).

Academic program review supports the assessment of institutional effectiveness through a comprehensive, systematic self-study and peer review process that keeps decisions about the curriculum in the hands of the faculty, while helping the program understand itself and make improvements in the context of the institution.

### **Overview of the APR Process**

The APR process comprises the following elements:

1. Preparing for the self-study
  - a. Review/develop goals and student learning outcomes
  - b. Prepare faculty and alumni surveys and/or focus groups
  - c. Identify areas of focus for the self-study
2. Conducting the self-study
  - a. Collect and analyze data and assessment results
3. Writing the APR report
4. Meeting with department, college, and provost leadership
5. Implementing action plans, responding to recommendations, and participating in ongoing assessment

The active APR process takes about 15 months, beginning with a spring orientation and ending with a closure meeting with senior leadership in the spring semester of the subsequent year. A timeline follows on the next page.

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<sup>1</sup> Principle 3.3.1, *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, 2012, Fifth Edition, Second Printing, <http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp>

**ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW TIMELINE FOR UNITS REPORTING IN 2018**

Academic Year	Task	Responsible Party	Deadline
2016-2017	Appointment of Unit Self-Study Committee (USSC) members	Unit Leader	November
	Forward contact information for USSC members to Shannon Nix, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA)	Unit Leader	December
	APR Orientation	Unit Leader & USSC	January
	<b>Faculty survey: List of faculty participants, additional questions and or alternative to launch date of Feb. 20 sent to OIRA</b>	<b>Unit Leader/USSC</b>	<b>February 3</b>
	<b>Alumni Survey: Additional questions and or alternative to launch date of Feb. 20 sent to OIRA</b>	<b>Unit Leader/USSC</b>	<b>February 3</b>
	Review curriculum maps, SLOs and program assessment plans	USSC/ Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	February
	Identify 4-6 peer programs and the parameters that will be used for comparison	Program Faculty	February
	SLO, Curriculum Maps & Measures Workshop (1 hour to be scheduled with OIRA)	USSC/ Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	February-March
	Findings & Action Plans Workshop (1 hour to be scheduled with OIRA)	USSC/ Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	March
	Mission, Goals & Strategic Planning Workshop (1 hour to be scheduled with OIRA)	USSC/ Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	April
	Conduct assessments on SLOs not yet completed	Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	May
	Develop improvement plans from SLO assessment results	Program Directors/ Assessment Coordinators	May-June
	Conduct peer comparison	USSC	June
	Review and analyze all relevant data (e.g. institutional data, survey data, & program SLO assessment results)	USSC	July-September
	2017-2018	Use data and results to identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement (e.g. findings)	USSC
Present findings to faculty, conduct SWOT Analysis, and develop goals and priorities for unit and programs		USSC	August-September
Finalize unit and program action plans		USSC	October 1
Write self-study		USSC	October-November
<b>Submit self-study draft for review to OIRA</b>		<b>USSC</b>	<b>December 1</b>
Receive feedback on draft		USSC	January 1
Revise draft and submit final self-study report to Unit Leader		USSC	January 26
<b>Submit an electronic copy of the final self-study report to OIRA</b>		<b>Unit Leader</b>	<b>February 2</b>
Final APR Self-Study report sent to Internal APR Peer Review Team		OIRA	February 2
Internal APR Peer Review Team Report sent to OIRA		APR Team Chair	March 2
Internal APR Peer Review Team meets with OIRA and Associate Provosts of Undergraduate and Graduate Education		OIRA	March 31
Internal APR Peer Review Team Report and OIRA memorandum sent to Unit Leader		OIRA	April 1
Unit meeting with senior leadership to discuss findings, recommendations and future directions		OIRA	April 27
Closure memorandum <i>or</i> Further Actions Required memorandum sent to Unit Leader & Dean	OIRA	May 5	

## THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

APR begins with a yearlong self-study process. The self-study comprises many activities, and these activities require much time and thought. Therefore, careful planning is essential. The following sections outline each of the self-study activities and provide tips for how and when to conduct these activities. Generally speaking, all self-study activities require collaboration among several faculty members.

For academic units, the self-study includes unit-level elements and program-level elements. Interdisciplinary programs not housed in a particular department or school should include only program-level elements.

### Self-Study: Unit Level Activities

#### ***Prior Unit Goals and Linking to Previous Reports***

Although in assessment we often talk about outcomes, goals play a crucial part in APR. Goals are broader than outcomes, and an academic unit should have several goals that guide its operation. Goals can pertain to how a unit or program is run, but they can also be more theoretical, focusing on a particular method or framework that the unit will use. Goals often delineate the services, opportunities, or experiences that the unit or program would like to offer students.

The first step in the self-study is to reflect on previous goals and what has been achieved since the unit submitted its last APR report. If the unit has not participated in APR previously, other goal setting documents such as SCHEV program approvals, college curriculum committee proposals, and prior MATS/Tk20 assessment reports can be reviewed. The top table in the [Goal Setting Worksheet](#) offers a place to record how previously set goals have been met, and which goals still need attention. The Goal Setting Worksheet will also be used later in the self-study process to brainstorm new goals.

#### ***Soliciting Feedback from Faculty***

In order to understand how current faculty perceive the unit, students, and leadership, a faculty survey will need to be administered. OIRA will provide the **survey questions template** (Blackboard: Organizations: Academic Program Review 2018) for review and unit faculty are encouraged to send OIRA additional questions that they would like included on the survey. Units will also need to decide whether the survey should go to only tenure-line faculty, or whether term faculty and adjuncts will be included. The faculty survey is administered by OIRA during the spring 2017 semester.

*List of faculty participants, additional questions and alternative survey launch date to OIRA: **February 3, 2017***

*Earliest Launch Date: **February 20, 2017***

*Turn-around time: **6 weeks from launch date***

#### ***Peer Comparison***

Another important step in the self-study is a comparison of similar departments or programs at peer institutions. The peer comparison may be qualitative or quantitative. Comparisons might include the number and type of degree programs offered, number of degrees granted, admissions criteria and acceptance rates, number of faculty, or levels of graduate student funding. Faculty from the unit should identify peer institutions and programs; it is up to the unit to decide which institutions should be considered peers for operational and strategic planning purposes. Units do not have to use Mason's list of peer institutions. See the [Peer Comparison Sources](#) handout for links to publically available data. Programs are encouraged to contact peers directly for data and information that is not available via the sources provided.

*Identify peers: **February 28, 2017***

*Contact peers and collect data: **June 15, 2017***

## **SWOT Analysis**

A SWOT analysis is a planning tool that summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the unit. Strengths and weaknesses are determined by factors internal to the unit, whereas opportunities and threats come from sources external to the unit. While strengths and opportunities are positive, weaknesses and threats can be harmful to the continued success of the unit/program. Consider the following as you conduct the SWOT Analysis:

What are the **Strengths** of the unit?

*Strength* = core capability; something your students, colleagues and institution value; you passed the “better than your peers/competitors” test

Questions to ask:                   What are our unique strengths?  
  What do we well or better than anyone else?

What are the **Weaknesses** of the unit?

*Weakness* = Any existing, potential, or missing element which creates a barrier to maintaining or achieving success or improvement; maybe you failed the “better than your peers/competitors” test

Questions to ask:                   What should we do better in the future?  
  What knowledge/skills/abilities do we lack?  
  What systems do we need to change?

What are **Opportunities** for your unit?

*Opportunity* = Anything in the external environment that, if properly used, could provide an advantage to your unit or program

Questions to ask:                   What (Who) are our key success enablers?  
  What partnerships can we create?  
  What additional “services” can we offer to our students?  
  What new market(s) are we well positioned to explore?

What are **Threats** to the unit?

*Threat* = Anything in the external environment that could erode a strength of your program or a situation that is out of your control and has the potential to harm your program

Questions to ask:                   What are barriers to progress and or improvement?  
  What are the possible impacts of what peers/competitors are doing?  
  What regulatory issue(s) be of concern?

Ideally, all faculty members from the unit should participate in the SWOT analysis. The [SWOT Analysis Worksheet](#) can be used to record the main findings of the analysis. The SWOT analysis is best done at the unit level; however, individual degree programs can certainly be examined in the analysis.

*Complete SWOT: September 15, 2017*

## **Setting Current Goals and Developing a Unit Action Plan**

Once the SWOT analysis, faculty survey, alumni surveys, and learning outcomes assessments have been completed, new goals for the unit will need to be set. The new unit goals should:

- Reflect careful consideration of the data and analysis presented in the self-study,
- Be focused on strengthening the program in improving student learning and success, and



- Be accompanied by action plans that will serve as the strategic direction for the unit for the next 5-7 years. Use the Current Goals table in the [Goal Setting Worksheet](#) and the [Action Plan Template](#) to guide this process.

*Complete Unit Goals and Action Plan: **October 1, 2016***

## **Self-Study: Degree Program Level Activities**

The following sections pertain to activities of the self-study that should be conducted at the degree-program level. Units that offer more than one degree should do each activity for each degree program. As with the unit level activities, it is essential that multiple faculty members participate in order to include a broad representation of perspectives within each degree program.

### ***Soliciting Feedback from Current Students and Alumni***

Several surveys are administered on an annual basis to graduating students and recent alumni. These include the Graduating Senior Survey, Graduate Student Exit Survey, One Year Out Career Survey, Career Plans Survey and Students as Scholars – OSCAR Survey. Searchable survey results for your program can be found by going to Reports and Data tab on the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment home page (<https://ira.gmu.edu/>) and selecting the *SURVEYS* from the dropdown menu. Trends over the last 5 years should be explored and discussed. Survey results for the current academic year will be available in September 2017.

In addition to the annual surveys, a separate alumni survey for each degree *program* in your unit will be administered in spring 2017. OIRA will provide the survey questions template (Blackboard: Organizations: Academic Program Review 2018) for review and program faculty are encouraged to send OIRA additional questions that they would like included on the survey. Optionally, individual degree programs may wish to solicit more in-depth feedback from their current students or alumni. OIRA can conduct focus groups with current students and/or alumni to collect feedback about the degree program.

We strongly advise each unit to take an active role in soliciting feedback from alumni. While the university collects contact information from alumni who consent to being contacted, social media has allowed faculty and staff from academic units more direct access to alumni. OIRA will administer the alumni surveys on February 20, 2017 (or on an alternative date of the unit's choice). Promoting the survey and asking alumni to participate via social media is highly recommended.

*Additional survey questions, invitation signatory & message, and alternative launch date to OIRA: **February 3, 2017***

*Earliest survey launch date: **February 20, 2017***

*Turn-around time: **6 weeks from launch date***

*(Optional) Identify focus groups participants and questions: **March 3, 2017***

### ***Making a Curriculum Map***

A curriculum map visually represents when and where student learning outcomes are covered and assessed in the curriculum. Curriculum mapping should be done in collaboration with all the instructors who teach in the degree program. Ask instructional faculty to provide copies of syllabi, assignments, exams, papers, etc. to illustrate when and where student learning outcomes are covered in their classes.

[How to Create a Curriculum Map](#) and [Curriculum Map Template](#) can be used to guide the curriculum mapping process. The degree program's curriculum map should also be uploaded into Tk20 under Supporting Documents within the Mission Statement section of Assessment Planning.

*Complete Curriculum Map: **February 15, 2017***

### ***Creating Program Goals and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes***

In the section above, unit-level goal setting was discussed. Just as with unit-level goals, program-level goals can be broad statements about how the program is run or the opportunities the program will present to students. The [Goal Setting Worksheet](#) can be used for program-level goals, or you can simply generate a list of goals for each degree program.

Each degree program should already have identified 5-7 student learning outcomes and submitted reports on those outcomes in MATS and Tk20. Ideally, these outcomes should link to the larger goals of the program or the unit. Note that programs that have already identified their outcomes, conducted their assessments, and reported the information in Tk20 can use these outcomes and assessment data for their APR reports. For degree programs that have not yet conducted assessments of the 5-7 student learning outcomes, the [Assessment Plan Template](#) should be used to determine how each outcome will be measured and how and when the evidence will be collected.

### ***Guiding Questions for Student Learning Assessment***

- To what extent are students developing the expected knowledge and skills in the program?
- To what extent does the program collect and maintain summative evidence of student learning? To what extent does the evidence allow the program to gauge student growth?
- Are the learning outcomes clear and measurable? Do they describe complex, higher-order knowledge and skills?
- To what extent does the set of learning outcomes represent a scope and depth of student learning that appropriate for the degree level? To what extent will achievement of the learning outcomes prepare students for service, employment, or advanced education?
- How well does the assessment plan identify the criteria that will be used to review student work or documentation for each learning outcome? What evidence or types of documentation will be used to assess each outcome?
- To what extent are faculty involved in the assessment of student learning outcomes? To what extent are students themselves involved in assessment of learning?

*Outcomes Assessment Completed: Spring 2017*

### ***Analyzing Institutional Data***

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) collects data about degree programs. Institutional Research (IR) tracks program enrollment and number of degrees awarded per year. Additionally, Institutional Assessment (IA) regularly surveys Mason students and collects data about student experiences, career plans, and post-graduation activities. These institutional data should be used to investigate student success and program effectiveness. Analyses should be based on data from the most recent five years.

These institutional data are available on the OIRA website (<https://ira.gmu.edu/academic-program-review/resources/> and <https://irr2.gmu.edu/ProgTrend/>). OIRA staff will be available to assist units in locating the relevant data. Programs should use the [Data Synthesis Worksheet](#) to analyze the institutional data to determine the program's effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement.

*Complete Analysis: September 15, 2017*

## **WRITING THE APR REPORT**

Once all the self-study activities have been completed, the Academic Program Review report must be written. Two report templates are available: one is for departments/schools and the other is for interdisciplinary programs. The templates list all the required sections of the report, and under each section heading there is a short instructional paragraph that describes what should be included in that section. These instructions, written in italics, should be deleted once the final report has been written.

Writing the report will take a substantial amount of time, and the self-study activities completed during the first year will be incorporated into the report in various ways. Plan on spending the fall 2017 semester writing and compiling the report. Because units across campus vary drastically in size and scope, there are no page limits or length expectations. Units that run multiple degree programs will have longer reports than programs that offer a single degree. Lastly, units are expected to submit a draft report to the Office of Institutional Assessment by December 1, 2017. The draft will be reviewed and returned to the units with notes.

***Draft due date: December 1, 2017***

## Report Components

*For interdisciplinary programs, the APR report will not have separate unit and program sections (see the template).*

### Unit Overview

- **Mission.** Describe the mission of the unit in relation to the university's mission and current strategic plan. See [How to Craft an Effective Mission](#) Statement for guidance.
- **Discussion of degree programs offered.** Briefly describe each degree program that the unit currently offers, including certificates and programs that have external accreditation and will not be further discussed in this report. Also include a brief discussion of minors, if any are offered. When possible, describe when and why the program was established. For degree programs with external accreditation, provide general information about the accrediting body and when the last review or site visit took place.
- **Internal academic ties and contributions to university-wide initiatives.** Discuss academic ties to other units on campus. This section should also describe the unit's participation in university-wide initiatives (i.e., *Students as Scholars* QEP, Mason Korea, etc.) and Mason Core (formerly, general education) offerings.
- **External and international relationships.** Report major educational collaborations with local, state, national and international organizations or institutions. This section should indicate the unit's involvement in educational activities outside of the immediate campus community. If the unit regularly offers study abroad opportunities or other international experiences for students and/or faculty, include a description of those activities.
- **Alumni relationships and activities.** Explain outreach efforts to the unit's alumni. How does the unit keep in touch with alumni? Does the unit offer special programming for alumni? Does the unit give an alumni award or do anything to recognize alumni? Are alumni involved in the review of student projects?
- **Distance education.** Report the unit's distance education offerings, both courses and degree programs. Explain plans for developing further distance education opportunities in the short and long term. Specify the extent to which the unit has worked with Mason Online to develop DE offerings.
- **Faculty profile.** Discuss the faculty profile in terms of proportion of tenure-line faculty, full-time faculty, and faculty with terminal degrees. Address the diversity and area expertise of the faculty. Include relevant findings from the APR Faculty Survey regarding overall faculty satisfaction with the unit. Please do not include faculty CVs or bio sketches.
- **Scholarly activity and service.** Assessment of the extent to which department scholarly activity and service goals are being met.
- **Resources.** Report the unit's resources. This may include physical spaces and equipment as well as external funding through grants or gifts. Also include a discussion of the roles of the support staff in the unit.
- **Peer comparison.** How does the unit as a whole compare to peer institutions or universities that have similar programs? The peer comparison may be qualitative or quantitative. Comparisons might include the number and type of degree programs offered, number of degrees granted, admissions criteria and acceptance rates, number of faculty, levels of graduate student funding. Units are responsible for identifying peer institutions. Units do not necessarily have to use institutions on Mason's peer institution list. OIRA can help with finding publicly available data from SCHEV and the U.S. Department of Education.
- **SWOT analysis.** Report strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the unit.

- **Other relevant information.** Discipline- or unit-specific accomplishments, needs, and concerns that help to understand the unit and its programs. Consider including upcoming or planned changes, challenges, initiatives, etc.
- **Unit goals and action plans.** Describe the unit's current goals and associated action plans. Note that the unit's goals should be broader than the goals reported in the degree program sections. When possible, identify the origin of each goal (i.e., SWOT analysis, peer comparison, faculty survey, etc.). A timeline for achieving each action plan, the achievement target and the process for evaluating achievement should also be included. If the unit submitted an APR report in the past, discuss progress on meeting the previous cycle's goals.

**Degree Program(s)** (include a separate section for each undergraduate and graduate degree program in the unit)

- **Overview and mission.** Describe the history and development of the program, including any concentrations, tracks, or specializations that are offered. For programs that are well-established, discuss how the program has evolved over the years and how it has adapted to changes in the field and/or the university. For programs that are newer, describe the initial expectations for the program and any major changes that have been made to the program. Report the mission of the program in relation to the unit's mission, the university's mission and the current strategic plan. See [How to Craft an Effective Mission Statement](#) for guidance.
- **Discussion of curriculum.** Discuss the curriculum: identify core courses and requirements, describe WI, RS, and synthesis courses as well as capstone experiences, internships, and senior paper/project requirements or options. Describe any major changes to the curriculum that have recently been made or that are planned for the very near future. **Attach a curriculum map**, either in this section or as an appendix. If you have not created a curriculum map for your program, please see [How to Create a Curriculum Map](#) in the appendix for guidance.
- **Size and scope of the program.** Analyze and discuss five year trends of enrollments and degrees granted. Explain any major changes or significant downward or upward trends. Comment on retention of students in the program.
- **Student success.** Discuss student satisfaction with the program, course offerings, faculty and advising. Also analyze students' success upon graduating from the program in terms of graduate school acceptances and job placements. Describe the program's advising system and its effectiveness.
- **Program-level outcomes and assessment.** List the program's 5-7 student learning outcomes and for *each* outcome describe the measures and methods of the assessment, findings, and whether the findings met the achievement target. Units that offer programs at Mason Korea must report separately on Mason Korea students.

Notes on outcomes assessment:

- Use primarily direct measures of student supported by indirect measures if available. See [Direct and Indirect Measures](#) in the appendix for examples.
- Include the assessment instruments used (rubrics, achievement criteria, etc.) in an appendix to the APR self-study report.
- The [SLOA Rubric](#) that will be used by the peer reviewers to evaluate this section is included in the appendix. Please refer to this rubric for expectations and see [A Step-by-Step Guide to Assessment](#) for best practices.
- Undergraduate programs are required to have one learning outcome that supports written communication.
- Programs that work with *Students as Scholars* are asked to include at least one outcome related to undergraduate research & creative activities.
- **Interpretation of results.** What meaning does your team make of the assessment results? Describe the "big picture" or broader implications of the findings and how the findings will be used to improve student learning.
- **Program Action Plans.** Based on the outcomes assessments, student success data or other evidence, identify the action plans for the program. A timeline for achieving each action plan, the achievement target and the process

for evaluating achievement should also be included. Use the Current Goals table in the [Goal Setting Worksheet](#) and the [Action Plan Template](#) to guide this process.

### **Certificates**

A discussion of certificates should include the following components:

- The purpose of the certificate
- Student enrollment and characteristics of student participants (e.g. Who does the program serve?)
- Assessment of at least two outcomes
  - One must be a learning outcome; others may be program outcomes
  - Assessment of learning outcomes must include direct assessment of student work

### **Concluding Statement**

Discuss the main accomplishments, concerns or issues, and resources needed to carry out plans. Acknowledge upcoming involvements or issues to consider. Discuss decisions and recommendations for the unit's programs.

### **Tips for Report Writing**

- **Plan ahead.** Do not wait until the last minute to write the report. Readers can easily spot a report that was written in a hurry.
- **Divide the workload.** Several faculty members should be responsible for the report writing. Consider using Google Docs or other file sharing methods so that collaboration is seamless.
- **Be concise.** Many readers will be reading several APR reports over the span of a few weeks. Rambling text and vague claims will make it harder for readers to focus on main points.
- **Take advantage of this opportunity.** The report is the place to highlight the unit's achievements, to thoughtfully discuss how the unit and its degree programs can be improved, and plan for the future.

### **Working Together as a Committee**

A collaborative committee is crucial to the success of the program review. Select a committee of committed and well-respected faculty who are engaged in the research, teaching, and service activities of your program. Establish roles and responsibilities of the committee members, and identify key people outside of the committee who will need to be involved. Set up meeting times in advance, keeping in mind the 12-month self-study time period. Set agendas for each meeting, planning sufficient time for completing tasks in the interim periods. Consider setting up a longer retreat or planning period for key pieces of the process. A shared space on Blackboard has been set up under Organizations for APR committee members to share and exchange data, drafts, etc. Establish a communication plan for the committee. Be flexible!

## **THE REVIEW PROCESS**

Academic Program Review reports are peer reviewed by tenured Mason faculty who participate in the Academic Program Review Committee. Each APR report is read and evaluated by a review team consisting of at least two APR Committee members. As many as six APR Committee members may be asked to review some reports from departments that have multiple degree programs.

Review teams have access to not only the final report, but also to the worksheets, institutional data, survey results, and other self-study materials. Review teams evaluate their assigned APR report using rubrics provided by OIRA. They then write an analysis that addresses the unit's program goals, action plans, outcomes assessments, and alignment with the university's mission and strategic plan. The analysis also identifies issues that may require further attention. Each review team meets with the Associate Provosts of Undergraduate and Graduate Education and OIRA staff to discuss their assigned APR report. After the review team has submitted their response document and met with the associate provosts

and OIRA staff, the analysis report is sent to the unit. Finally, each unit meets with the Associate Provosts of Undergraduate and Graduate Education, the dean, and OIRA staff to address any outstanding issues and to create follow-up plans as needed.

The Office of Institutional Assessment also produces an APR Guide for Reviewers. This guide outlines the review process in more detail and provides the rubrics to be used in the review. This guide is available on the OIRA website for your use.

## APPENDIX: RESOURCES FOR THE SELF-STUDY

### Office of Institutional Assessment

The Office of Institutional Assessment hosts many useful resources for the self-study on its website.

<https://ira.gmu.edu/academic-program-review/>

- APR Reporting Schedule
- Data Resources for the APR Self-Study
- Information for APR Reviewers
- APR Guides
- Excellence in Academic Program Review Award
- Institutional surveys and assessment reports

### Institutional Research and Reporting

<https://irr2.gmu.edu>

- Academic Program Review support page:  
<https://irr2.gmu.edu/ProgTrend/>

### Contact:

Dr. Shannon Nix  
George Mason University  
Office of Institutional Research and Assessment  
703.993.8616  
snix2@gmu.edu  
assessment.gmu.edu





**STEP 3. DEFINE S.M.A.R.T. OBJECTIVES**

**GOAL 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GOAL 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GOAL 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GOAL 4:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PEER COMPARISON RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC UNITS

### Mason Data Resources from the APR Self-Study page:

<https://assessment.gmu.edu/academic-program-review/resources/>

### SCHEV:

<http://research.schev.edu/>

On this SCHEV Research link the department can find data, by Virginia Institution, on Enrollment and Degree as well as many other areas such as post completion wages. The data is based on files that each institution submits to SCHEV.

*In order to find peers, you will need the CIP (classification of instructional program) code to search for other programs or departments. You can perform a simple search for CIP codes at: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/Default.aspx?y=55>.*

### IPEDS:

Main Data center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Home/UseTheData>

Institution Comparisons: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/login.aspx?gotoReportId=1>. The only report for which program CIP codes are reporting is the Degrees completions. Please contact Angela Detlev ([adetlev@gmu.edu](mailto:adetlev@gmu.edu)) with questions about how to use the IPEDS site.

### National Center for Education Statistics:

Main: <http://nces.ed.gov/>

College Navigator: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. Searchable database by institution name, state, program, degree type and institution type with some program level data.

### NSF data:

National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics: <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/data.cfm>.

Academic Institution Profiles: <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/>. Presents selected data for individual institutions on doctorates, graduate students, funding and expenditures from four NCSES surveys.

### Chronicle of Higher Education:

Main: <http://www.chronicle.com/section/Facts-Figures/58/?cid=UCHETOPNAV>

Graduation rates by state and institution: <http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/>

### AAUP:

Main: <https://www.aaup.org/>. Publishes information on education issues with an annual faculty salary profile.

### Professional Organizations

**ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE**

**Purpose:** To create a “script” for your improvement efforts and support implementation.

**Directions:** Using this form as a *template*, develop an action plan for each goal identified through the assessment process. **Modify the form as needed to fit your unique context.**

**Goal:**

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE				
GOAL(S) SUPPORTED:	OBJECTIVES SUPPORTED:		STRATEGY(IES):	
Action Steps	Responsible Party	Timeline	Resources Requirements	Potential Barriers
Step 1:				
Step 2:				
Step 3:				
Step 4:				
Etc.				

**Evaluation Process** (*How will you determine that your goal has been reached? How are you tracking progress?*)

Adapted from: [http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/pages/219\\_5..doc](http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/pages/219_5..doc)

**SWOT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET**

Positive

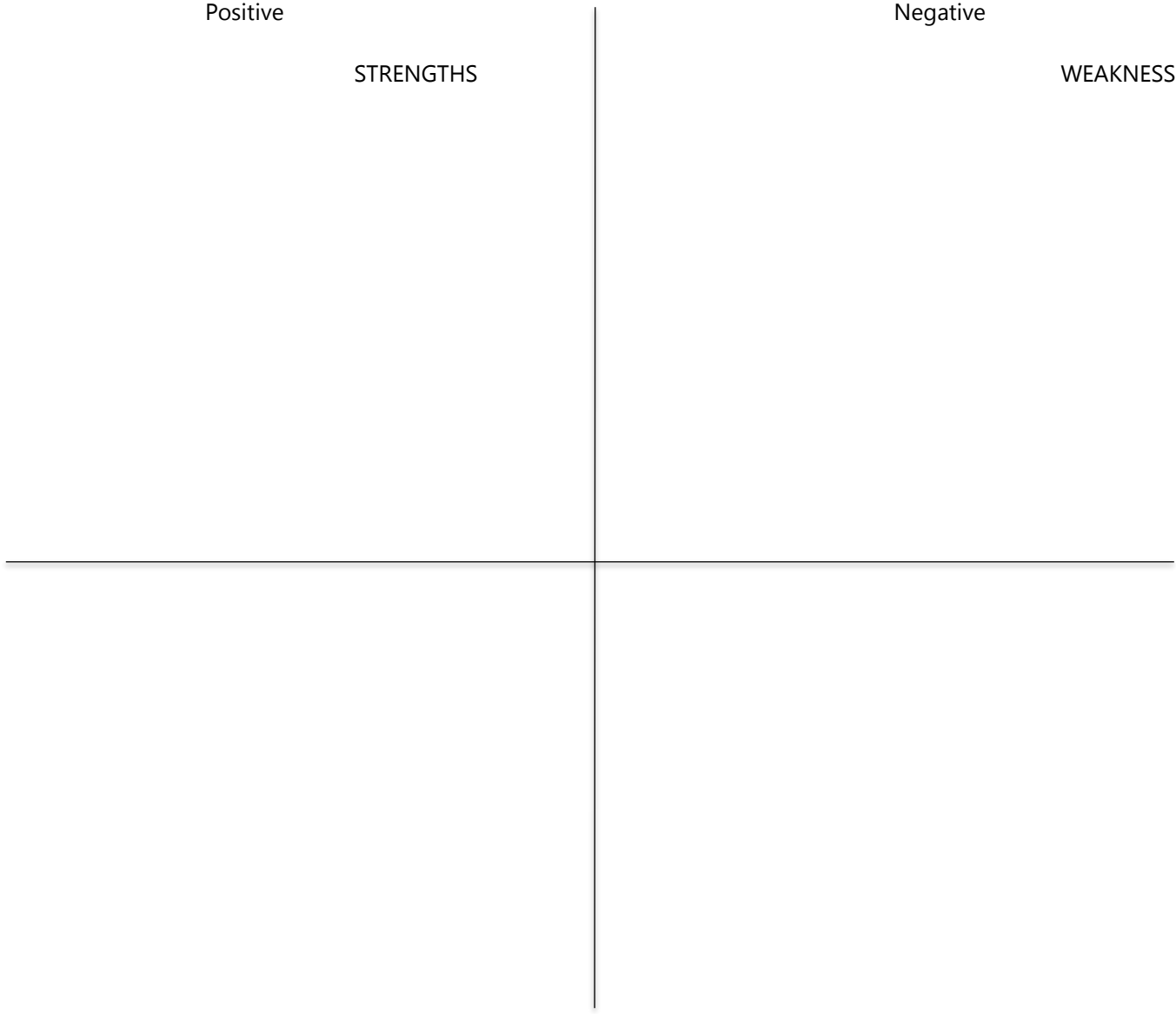
Negative

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

Internal

External



OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

**ASSESSMENT PLAN TEMPLATE**

	Outcome Statement	Link to Program Goal	Measurement Plan				How will findings be used?
			What evidence will be collected? (e.g., capstone project, paper, thesis defense)	When will evidence be collected?	Who will conduct the assessment?	What rubric, scoring sheet or other instrument will be used?	
Student Learning Outcome 1							
Student Learning Outcome 2							
Student Learning Outcome 3							
Student Learning Outcome 4							
Student Learning Outcome 5							

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## HOW TO CREATE A CURRICULUM MAP

*Adapted from University of Northern Colorado, Office of Assessment*

Example 1a: Curriculum map with advanced key showing extent to which learning occurs in courses and in which courses outcomes are assessed.

Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes Upon graduation, students will be able to:	Program Courses						
	Course 100	Course 201	Course 301	Course 310	Course 320	Course 330	Course 401 Senior Seminar
1. critique human behavior and social structure from a sociological perspective.	I	I	E	E	R	R	E/A
2. analyze social issues using sociological theoretical perspectives.	I	I	E	E			E/A
3. apply research techniques in a sociology-related project with real world implications.		I			I	R	E/A
4. communicate knowledge of sociology through written and oral work.	I	I	E		R	E	E/A
Key I = concept related to learning outcome introduced E = concept related to learning outcome emphasized R = concept related to learning outcome reinforced A = concept related to learning outcome assessed							

Below are other examples of keys that could be used:

Example 1b.

I = Introduced

R = reinforced and opportunity to practice

M = mastery at the senior or exit level

A = assessment evidence collected

Example 1c.

1 = Some emphasis

2 = Moderate emphasis

3 = Significant emphasis

4 = Assessment occurs

### Using a curriculum map to evaluate a curriculum

A curriculum map can be used to identify gaps between expected student learning outcomes and what is taught and assessed in a curriculum. A curriculum map can demonstrate if a course sequence effectively scaffolds and prepares students to achieve the learning outcomes. Identification of gaps and issues in a curriculum map can lead to curricular changes to improve student learning opportunities. Below are questions that can guide analyses of and discussions related to curriculum maps:

1. Are all student learning outcomes taught and taught with the appropriate sequence in the curriculum?
2. Are all student learning outcomes assessed and assessed at the appropriate time?
3. Do all core courses support the development of at least one student learning outcome?
4. Are there any core courses that don't support the student learning outcomes?
5. Do the core courses sufficiently support the development of the student learning outcomes?
6. Is the sequence of how the learning outcomes are taught across the courses appropriate and the most effective at supporting students' development of the learning outcomes?



7. What changes to courses, learning outcomes, sequence students take classes, and so on could improve the alignment between student learning outcomes and the curriculum?

**Example of analyzing a curriculum map**

A program is summarized in the curriculum map in Example B. This table and the following discussion are modified from Allen (2004, p. 43).

Example 2. Example of curriculum map.

Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes Upon graduation, students will be able to:	Program Courses								
	100	120	200	204	300	329	400	480	490
Learning outcome 1	I		E		R	R			RA
Learning outcome 2		I							
Learning outcome 3			E		E		R		RA
Learning outcome 4									
Learning outcome 5									RA
Learning outcome 6	I	I	E	E		R			RA
Key I = concept related to learning outcome introduced E = concept related to learning outcome emphasized R = concept related to learning outcome reinforced A = concept related to learning outcome assessed									

- Learning outcome 2: Learning outcome 2 is introduced, but not taught or assessed elsewhere in the curriculum. Students may not be developing advanced knowledge related to outcome 2 and the program is unable to determine the extent to which students have achieved that outcome. One possible reason for the pattern is that the outcome isn't important; therefore, faculty members don't emphasis the outcome in classes. Alternatively, the outcome could be critical to the curriculum; however, it was not realized until the creation of the curriculum map that that outcome wasn't addressed in the courses.
- Learning outcome 3: Learning outcome 3 is not formally introduced in the curriculum. However, it is emphasized in intermediate course and reinforced and assessed in upper-level courses. Faculty members will need to determine why the outcome isn't introduced in core program courses. Sometimes programs expect that general education classes will introduce learning outcomes to students. If an outcome is expected to be introduced in a general education class then program faculty members will need to work with the general education class faculty members to ensure that the learning outcome is introduced in those courses.
- Learning outcome 4: The learning outcome was not included in the curriculum. Faculty members will want to determine if that outcome was an old outcome that is no longer relevant and can be eliminated. Alternative, there may have been an oversight and the curriculum may need to be modified to include teaching related to that outcome.
- Learning outcome 5: Learning outcome 5 hasn't been introduced and emphasized in introductory, intermediate, and most advanced classes. It is reinforced and assessed in one advanced-level class. Faculty members teaching the advanced class may have assumed that the learning outcome was taught in previous courses; however, it has not been addressed earlier in the program. Students may not be sufficiently prepared for this learning outcome.
- Learning outcome 6: There is good alignment between learning outcome 6 and the courses. Learning outcome 6 is introduced early in the program, emphasized in intermediate courses, and reinforced and assessed in upper-level courses.



## EXAMPLES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT MEASURES

### Examples of *Direct* Measures of Student Learning

- **Scores and pass rates on standardized tests** (licensure/certification as well as other published tests determining key student learning outcomes)
- **Writing samples**
- **Score gains** indicating the “value added” to the students’ learning experiences by comparing entry and exit tests (either published or locally developed) as well as writing samples
- **Locally designed quiz, test, and inventory questions that relate directly to the outcome being assessed**
- **Portfolio artifacts** (these artifacts could be designed for introductory, working, or professional portfolios)
- **Capstone projects** (these could include research papers, presentations, theses, dissertations, oral defenses, exhibitions, or performances)
- **Case studies**
- **Team/group projects and presentations**
- **Oral examination**
- **Internships, clinical experiences, practica, student teaching, or other professional/content-related experiences** engaging students in hands-on experiences in their respective fields of study (accompanied by ratings or evaluation forms from field/clinical supervisors)
- **Service-learning projects or experiences**
- **Authentic and performance-based projects or experiences** engaging students in opportunities to apply their knowledge to the larger community (accompanied by ratings, scoring rubrics or performance checklists from project/experience coordinator or supervisor)
- **Graduates’ skills in the workplace rated by employers**
- **Online course asynchronous discussions** analyzed by class instructors

### Examples of *Indirect* Measures of Student Learning

- **Course grades** Course grades are based on many iterations of direct measurement. But grades are an *indirect* measurement of any one course learning outcome because: (1) They represent a combination of course learning outcomes; performance on these outcomes are averaged out in a final grade, (2) They frequently include corrections not related to learning outcomes, such as extra credit or penalties for unexcused absences.
- **Grades assigned to student work in one particular course** also provide information about student learning *indirectly* because of the reasons mentioned above. Moreover, graded student work in isolation, without an accompanying scoring rubric, does not lead to relevant meaning related to overall student performance or achievement in one class or a program
- **Number or rate of graduating students pursuing their education at the next level**
- **Employment or placement rates of graduating students into appropriate career positions**
- **Course evaluation items related to the overall course or curriculum quality**, rather than instructor effectiveness
- **Number or rate of students involved in faculty research, collaborative publications and/or presentations, service or learning**
- **Surveys, questionnaires, open-ended self-reports, focus-group or individual interviews** dealing with *current students’* perception of their own learning
- **Surveys, questionnaires, focus-group or individual interviews** dealing with *alumni’s* perception of their own learning or of their current career satisfaction (which relies on their effectiveness in the workplace, influenced by the knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions developed in school)
- **Surveys, questionnaires, focus-group or individual interviews** dealing with the *faculty and staff members’* perception of student learning as supported by the programs and services provided to students
- **Quantitative data**, such as enrollment numbers

[Adapted from Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for learning: building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. Sterling, VA: AAHE; and Suskie, L. (2004). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. San Francisco, CA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.]

### SLOA PEER REVIEWER RUBRIC

**Guiding Question: Does each program have an assessment plan that demonstrates what students will be able to do/know and is the unit using the findings to improve student learning?**

	Excellent	Acceptable	Needs Attention
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>			
Focus on student achievement	Describes in detail what <i>graduating</i> students will know and be able to do	Describes in general what students will know and be able to do	Focus is not on students, or does not describe a clear outcome
Achievable/ Measurable	All use precise action verbs (e.g. recognize, distinguish, demonstrate, etc.) and are clearly linked to student work	Use of action verbs inconsistent; measurable but could be more clear	Outcome is not realistic or not able to be measured clearly
<b>Achievement Targets</b>			
	Identifies one or more meaningful achievement targets - based on previous results or existing standards; that are specific, measurable and aligned with outcomes.	A specific and measurable target is identified for each outcome/measure. Target may not (appear to) be based on previous results or existing standards.	Targets have not been identified for every measure or are aligned with process rather than results. Language may be vague or subjective.
<b>Measures</b>			
Direct measures	All outcomes assessed using <i>multiple</i> measures, of which at least 1 is a direct measure.	Utilizes a single direct assessment measure per outcome.	Not all outcomes assessed use direct measures or outcomes assessed using only indirect measures (e.g. course grades).
Assessment Instruments	Assessment instruments (e.g. assignments, rubrics, surveys, etc.) reflect good research methodology/current best practices with explicit criteria.	Instruments are adequate for the task but could use improvement.	Instrument does not appear adequate or appropriate for the task.
<b>Findings</b>			
Derived from evidence	Findings are clearly presented, derived from a systematic analysis of outcomes and measures	A process is in place to derive findings from analysis of outcomes and measures	No findings; or findings are unrelated to evidence provided
Linked to program goals	Findings are framed in terms of achievement of program goals	Initial findings are linked to program goals	Findings do not correlate to stated program goals
Improvement/Action Plan	A clear plan for program improvement is derived from the findings	Plans for program improvement reflect beginning findings from assessment of SLO	No plan for improvement is included; or plan is not linked to student outcomes



## DATA SYNTHESIS WORKSHEET for PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

### ***Student Enrollment, Retention, and Degrees (Enrollment data)***

What is the demand for the program?

Who are the majors in terms of demographic data?

Are current enrollment levels okay, too low, too high?

### ***Educational Experiences and Post-Graduation Activities (assessment survey data)***

How well does the program prepare students for post-graduation activities?

What are some suggestions for improving educational/curricular activities?

Quality of advising- what could be better communicated? Could advising be better structured?

## HOW TO CRAFT AN EFFECTIVE MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement is a brief statement of the general values and principles which guide the program curriculum and/or department goals. There are several standard items that all mission statements should include. A mission statement sets a tone and a philosophical position from which goals and outcomes are developed. It communicates the overall purpose of a program or department. It distinguishes the program or department from similar areas, and it aligns clearly with the mission of the institution. It is also important to note that a Mission Statement is different than a Vision Statement. A Vision Statement looks to the future, where a Mission Statement is focused on what you are doing right now.

Four essential questions your mission statement must answer:

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
- Why do we do it?
- For whom do we do it?

**Who are we?** -- It's as simple as it sounds. State the name of your program or department (i.e. "The mission of the XYZ program is \_\_\_\_\_"). Avoid vague pronouns like "Our mission is..."

**What do we do?** -- This includes the primary functions or activities of the unit. Here, you will illustrate the most important functions, operations, outcomes, and/or offerings of the program or department.

**Why do we do it?** -- The purpose of the program or department. Should include the primary reasons why you perform your major activities or operations.

**For whom do we do it?** -- These are the stakeholders of your program or department. This is a term used in the business world, but is very much applicable here. The stakeholders are groups or individuals that participate in the program and those that will benefit from the program or department. Those of you who are writing a mission statement for an Academic Program, your stakeholders will most likely be your students.

### Structure of a mission statement

This is what your mission statement can look like when you take those four questions, and put them in sentence form. This is a good example of a structure you can follow. It is important to note that your mission statement doesn't have to look like this. The different pieces may vary.

The mission of *<the name of your program, department or unit>* is to *<your primary purpose(s)>* by providing *<your primary functions or activities>* to *<your stakeholders>*. (Add additional clarifying statements judiciously).

Examples:

The mission of the Department of Biological Sciences is to provide quality instruction and experiential learning in the broad field of biological sciences, to contribute to the field through scholarly research, to train the next generation of biological scientists and teachers, and to provide professional service.

The mission of the Department of English and Philosophy is to educate students in literary and philosophical content knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills, thereby preparing them to pursue further academic studies or for careers as teachers, writers or other professionals.

Checklist:

- Is the statement clear and concise?
- Does it clearly state the purpose of the program or department/school?
- Does it indicate the primary function or activities of the unit?
- Does it indicate who the stakeholders are?
- Does it support the mission of the department, college, and institution?

- Does it reflect the unit's priorities and values?

## **A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO ASSESSMENT**

### **Plan for assessment – Make it meaningful**

- What are the skills and knowledge you expect students of the program to have when they graduate?
- Talk to a wide range of faculty about what students seem to know and where knowledge gaps might be.
- Update the program's mission statement if necessary. Linking the assessment to the mission statement can help keep the process focused and meaningful.

### **Create (or revise) the program's student learning outcomes**

- Ideal learning outcomes indicate who will demonstrate the learning and contain an action verb (avoid "know" and "understand").
- Consult Bloom's Revised Taxonomy ([See Below](#)) to decide what level of learning you want to assess.
- Write the learning outcome so that it is measureable, concrete, and fairly simple. Abstract, complex learning outcomes are difficult to measure.

### **Map learning outcomes to courses (Curriculum Map)**

- Designate the learning outcomes that are covered in each course.
- Ask for faculty input to ensure that the curriculum map is accurate and faculty know the learning outcomes they should be targeting in their classes.
- Discuss courses that do not address any of the program's learning outcomes. What is their purpose in the curriculum?

### **Conduct the assessment – Who, when, and how to measure**

- Program-level assessment should be conducted only on students in the degree program. Do not include non-majors or students from other departments in a program-level assessment.
- Designate an achievement target. What percent of students should be able to achieve the learning outcome?
- Consider whether you want to assess achievement at the end of the degree program or whether you would like to show development throughout the program.
  - o To assess the end of the degree program, focus on the culminating final project of the program: capstone, senior project, Masters thesis, dissertation.
  - o To assess development, create a rubric that focuses on development of skills and knowledge. Pick artifacts from two classes or experiences and use the same rubric to score each one (a longitudinal approach is ideal, but cross-sectional is acceptable).



## LIST OF MEASURABLE VERBS USED TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES

### **Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956): Cognitive Skills**

A group of educators, led by Benjamin Bloom, identified a hierarchy of six categories of cognitive skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. As students learn, they start with the knowledge level and progress through the hierarchy. Thus, advanced courses should include skills at a higher level than introductory or basic skills courses. Below you will find a web-resource as well as a list of measurable verbs to assist you in writing course objectives and assess learning outcomes.

Knowledge Level: The successful student will recognize or recall learned information.

list	record	Underline
state	define	Arrange
name	relate	Describe
tell	recall	Memorize
recall	repeat	Recognize
label	select	Reproduce

Comprehension Level: The successful student will restate or interpret information in their own words.

explain	describe	Report
translate	express	Summarize
identify	classify	Discuss
restate	locate	Compare
discuss	review	Illustrate
tell	critique	Estimate
reference	interpret	Reiterate

Application Level: The successful student will use or apply the learned information.

apply	sketch	Perform
use	solve	Respond
practice	construct	role-play
demonstrate	conduct	Execute
complete	dramatize	Employ

Analysis Level: The successful student will examine the learned information critically.

analyze	inspect	Test
distinguish	categorize	Critique
differentiate	catalogue	Diagnose
appraise	quantify	Extrapolate
calculate	measure	Theorize
experiment	relate	Debate

Synthesis Level: The successful student will create new models using the learned information.

develop	revise	Compose
plan	formulate	Collect
build	propose	Construct
create	establish	Prepare
design	integrate	Devise
organize	modify	Manage

Evaluation Level: The successful student will assess or judge the value of learned information.

review	appraise	Choose
--------	----------	--------

justify  
assess  
defend  
report on  
investigate

argue  
rate  
score  
select  
measure

Conclude  
Compare  
Evaluate  
Interpret  
Support