

Guidelines for Annual Administrative Assessment

George Mason University
Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning

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Introduction

Overview

Administrative assessment is the process of planning and assessing goals and objectives for your administrative unit on an annual basis. The focus of administrative assessment is continuous improvement. At the beginning of the year, a unit sets objectives that will help it better achieve its goals and mission. At the end of the year, the unit assesses the progress made toward the objectives and uses the results of the assessment to begin planning for the next year, making it a cyclical process.

The annual assessment report includes the unit's mission, goals, objectives, assessment methods, assessment results, and plans for improvement. Units are also asked to identify the criteria for determining whether the objective has been met and the person responsible for assessing each objective. Units are encouraged to develop the goals, objectives, and measures at the beginning of the academic year and then report the assessment results and improvement plans at the end of the academic year.

Purpose

Administrative Assessment helps units engage effectively in continuous improvement. The regular process of planning and assessing objectives enables a unit to improve its operations and the services it offers. Additionally, SACSCOC [1, p. 62] requires that an institution's administrative units regularly engage in assessment activities that improve their administrative effectiveness.

SACSCOC Standard 7.3

The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved. (Administrative effectiveness)

Relationship to Other Planning and Reporting Activities

Some units engage in other forms of planning or reporting, such as the development of an internal strategic plan, budgetary planning, or reporting on key performance indicators. In some cases, the goals, objectives, or measures already developed for other reporting purposes can also be used for annual administrative assessment. If the goals, objectives, or measures developed for other reporting needs are relevant to the current year, and if they fit the administrative assessment framework, units should feel free to also use them as part of their annual administrative assessment.

Timeline

Summer and Early Fall: Planning Stage

Start planning your goals and objectives for the coming year in late summer or early fall. Planned goals, objectives, and assessment methods should be finalized and entered into Nuventive before the end of Fall term.

Late Spring and Early Summer: Reporting Stage

Conduct the assessment of your objectives and make improvement plans for the next year around May or June. At this time, you'll note whether your achievement target was met, analyze the results, and decide how to improve on the objective for the next year. All assessment information should be entered into Nuventive by June 30th.

The deadline for submitting your assessment report each year is June 30th.

Explanation of Components – Planning Stage

Mission

A mission statement is a brief description of the unit's purpose, what it does, its stakeholders, and how it contributes to the university's mission or strategic plan.

A common prompt to help you develop your mission statement is [2]:

The mission of [name of your unit] is to [your primary purpose] by providing [your primary functions or activities] to [your stakeholders]. The [services, products, etc.] contribute to Mason's mission by [describe how].

Examples Mission Statements:

ADVANCE – George Mason University

The mission of the Office of Community College Partnerships is to partner with Virginia Community College System institutions to fulfill the university's goal of providing a time and cost-effective pathway to a Mason bachelor's degree for every Virginian who wants one.

Auxiliary Services and Operations – George Mason University

The mission of Auxiliary Services and Operations is to improve the quality of campus life for students, faculty, staff, and the community. Auxiliary Services and Operations supports the university's overall strategic plan by providing quality goods, innovative services, and strategic business partnerships that improve value, increase student success, and enhance the university's financial condition.

Goals

Goals are broad statements about how your administrative unit fulfills its mission. Goals are long-term and aspirational. They serve as a bridge between the mission and the more specific objective statements – Indeed, they provide the framework for developing and organizing objectives [3]. Because of the general and long-term nature of goal statements, they are usually not measurable, and they do not tend to change much from year to year. Units usually have 3-5 goals.

In developing goals, consider the key functions or services of your administrative unit. What does it look like when you perform those key functions or services effectively?

A common prompt to help you develop your goals:

To fulfill this mission, [name of your unit] has [3-5] primary goals, which are to:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

As you make a list of your goals, you'll also want to consider the university's strategic priorities and how your unit's goals align with those.

Example Goals:

(Example goals have been crafted for these guidelines and are intended to represent goals typical of university administrative units. They do not necessarily represent those of George Mason units.)

Registrar's Office

Provide timely, precise guidance and support to students as they work toward degree completion, as well as faculty and staff involved in the graduation process.

University Pathways Program

Ensure all students are successfully matriculating and demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform well in their intended programs.

University Libraries

Provide collections and resources that support the information needs and scholarly pursuits of students and faculty.

Office of Budget and Planning

Support institutional planning by preparing, implementing, and monitoring the College's multi-year Financial Plan, and sharing reports with appropriate stakeholders.

Enrollment Management

In collaboration with internal partners (admissions, advising, financial aid, and registrar) optimize available technologies to create seamless workflows for students.

Short Names

When you enter your assessment plan in Nuventive, you'll be asked to include a short name for each goal and objective. These are labels that will appear in charts, tables, and other places in Nuventive when there is not enough room to display the entire goal or objective statement.

To create a short name, choose a couple words or a short phrase that best summarizes what your goal or objective is about. Examples of short names are:

Student Success	Enrollment	Administrative Infrastructure
Alumni Outreach	Technological Support	Partnerships

Objectives

Objectives are statements about what the administrative unit wants to achieve to better accomplish their goals.

- Objective statements are specific and measurable.
- Each objective should be aligned with one goal.
- Objectives may or may not change from year to year. (Some objectives become obsolete after a year; others may take multiple years to achieve.)

Depending on the size and scope of your unit, you may have anywhere between 3 and 9 objectives.

When developing an objective statement, consider the areas in which you want to improve and how they will help you better accomplish a goal. An objective should have a clear way of measuring success and a precise target that you want to achieve. (These are the assessment method and achievement target.)

Some helpful questions to answer as you brainstorm objectives:

- What do I need to improve/enhance/increase/reduce/develop to better accomplish this goal?
- How will I know if I'm successful? What will I measure?

Example Objectives:

(Examples objectives have been crafted for these guidelines and are intended to represent objectives typical of university administrative units. They do not necessarily represent those of George Mason units.)

- Increase the level of interdisciplinary research activity among faculty and staff.
- Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program.
- Reduce response time to service requests over the next year.

- Reduce summer melt for first-year undergraduate students.
- Improve dining options and services for students living on campus.

Example Objective with Assessment Method and Achievement Target:

- Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program.
 - o Assessment Method: Fall-to-spring retention rates will be measured using enrollment data in our unit’s ‘Main Enrollment Report’ pulled from Salesforce. We will calculate the % of students who are continuing in the program or have matriculated to university after their first semester vs those who have dropped out of the program. Retention rates will be calculated each March for the previous Fall cohort.
 - o Achievement Target: The current retention rate is 75%. We aim to achieve a retention rate of 85% within the next 3 years.

Avoid listing smaller tasks or action items as objectives. The objective should be the result you are striving for rather than the action item to get there. However, you can describe your implementation process and timeline in more detail under the objective. This may include the various projects or actions you have planned to help you achieve the desired result and the timeframe for those actions.

Example objective with additional implementation information:

Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program. To implement this, we’ll institute early intervention activities during the Fall semester for identifying and helping students of concern: Advisors will monitor weekly attendance reports and reach out to students of concern in weeks 3 and 5. They’ll also monitor midterm grades and reach out to students of concern in week 8. During the spring semester the advising team will review retention rates and early intervention activities and determine next steps for the following Fall.

Assessment Method

The assessment method answers the questions: How will you know whether you’ve achieved your objective? What type of data will you collect? Every objective should have at least one assessment method.

Assessment methods are often categorized as either direct or indirect measures. Direct measures directly assess whether an objective has been achieved whereas indirect measures provide information on perceptions related to that objective. Both direct and indirect measures are acceptable for administrative assessment.

Direct Assessment Methods	Indirect Assessment Methods
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Institutional Data Performance-Based Assessments Student Work Tracking Logs Error Rates Processing Time Audit Reports Productivity Reports Financial Reports	Surveys Course Evaluations Interviews Focus Groups SWOT Analysis Self-Studies Reflective Assessments
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When describing the assessment method, be as specific as possible. You should address the following questions in your description of the assessment method:

- How will you assess the objective?
- What is the name of the data source? For example, what is the name of the dashboard, survey, or report that you will be using?
- Who produces the data?
- What time period does the data cover?
- When will the data be collected?

Example Assessment Methods:

Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program.
Assessment Method: Fall-to-spring retention rates will be measured using enrollment data in our unit’s ‘Main Enrollment Report’ pulled from Salesforce. We will calculate the % of students who are continuing in the program or have matriculated to university after their first semester vs those who withdrew. Retention rates will be calculated each March for the previous Fall cohort.

Objective: Improve dining options and services for students living on campus.
Assessment Method: We will assess student satisfaction with dining options using the Division of Student Affairs’ Campus Living Survey administered every March to all students living on campus. Section C of the survey is dedicated to dining options and services and uses a Likert scale with ratings of 1-4. We will compare this year’s average ratings for section C to previous years’ ratings.

Achievement Target

An achievement target is a specific target that will indicate whether you were successful in meeting your objective. Achievement targets are usually quantitative – a number, percentage, or proportion.

Example Achievement Targets:

- Alumni donations to the University Foundation will increase by \$500,000 over the next four years.
- Enrollment will grow by 2% per year over three years.
- The average rating for survey items about dining options and services will meet or exceed 3.0 on a scale of 1-4.
- Average GPAs of student athletes will equal or exceed that of the undergraduate student body.
- 85% of survey respondents will indicate that they are “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with the support they received.
- 80% of technical service requests will be reviewed and processed within 24 hours of receipt [4].

Individual Responsible for Assessment

This is the person responsible for carrying out the assessment of the objective and reporting back on progress at the end of the year. Use the name of a person rather than a committee or department.

Explanation of Components – Reporting Stage

Conclusion

In the conclusion field, indicate whether the objective was met, partially met, or not met. It is perfectly acceptable for an objective to be “partially met” or “not met”. For units with objectives that take multiple years to achieve, it is likely that your response will be “partially met” until the final year. You may also encounter unexpected complications during the year which may cause your objective to be “Not Met” or “Partially Met”. Use the Results Discussion and Analysis field to explain your progress and any complications that occurred.

Results Discussion and Analysis

First state the results of the assessment. State the numerical results in the same format as the achievement target. For example, if your achievement target is written as a percent increase, your results statement should also be written as a percent increase. If your achievement target uses a total number, the results statement should include a total number. This makes it easy to compare your results to your achievement target.

After you state the results, analyze the findings and discuss the results in more detail. Are you making the desired progress toward your target? Why or why not? Depending on your objective, you could analyze trends you see in the data over time, consider cause and effect factors in the data, or compare results across subgroups. You may also want to discuss the quality of the data or suitability of the assessment method [5]. There should be some analysis

and discussion of results for every objective, however, the focus of the discussion and analysis will vary greatly depending on the objective.

Improvement Plans

Past improvements: Describe any improvements made since last year or during the current year to better achieve the objective. Here you may discuss any projects or action items that were implemented to achieve the objective and whether they had the desired impact. Discuss what worked well and what needs to be improved.

Future improvements: Explain whether you plan to continue with the objective and assessment method next year and why or why not. Use what you learned from the Results Discussion and Analysis and Past Improvements fields to inform your future improvements. If you do not plan to continue with the objective next year and instead prefer to move in a different direction, explain why and what your new plans are.

An example of Results Discussion and Analysis with corresponding Improvement Plans is provided in the example assessment report below.

Example Assessment Report

The example below shows completed information for one goal and one objective with the relevant assessment planning and reporting information. The example components have been crafted for the purposes of this guide and do not necessarily represent those of George Mason Units.

Unit Type: University Pathways

Mission: The mission of University Pathways is to ensure all students have the skills and abilities to thrive and succeed as they make the transition to university. Through a variety of programs tailored to meet students' academic, linguistic, and cultural needs, University Pathways advances the university's commitment to access and inclusive excellence.

PLANNING STAGE

Goal: Ensure all students are successfully matriculating and demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform well in their intended programs.

(Goal Short Name: Student Success)

Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program. To implement this, we'll institute early intervention activities during the Fall semester for identifying and helping students of concern: Advisors will monitor weekly attendance reports and reach out to students of concern in weeks 3 and 5. They'll also monitor midterm grades and reach out to students of concern in week 8. During the spring semester the advising team will review retention rates and activities and determine next steps for the following Fall.

(Objective Short Name: Undergraduate Retention)

Assessment Method: Fall-to-spring retention rates will be measured using enrollment data in our unit's 'Main Enrollment Report' pulled from Salesforce. We will calculate the % of students who are continuing in the program or have matriculated to university after their first semester vs those who withdrew. Retention rates will be calculated each March for the previous Fall cohort.

Achievement Target: The current retention rate is 75%. We aim to achieve a retention rate of 85% within the next 3 years.

Individual Responsible for Assessment: John Doe

REPORTING STAGE

Conclusion: Partially Met

Results Discussion and Analysis:

The retention rate for last fall (the first year for this objective) was 80%. This is an improvement of 5% compared to last fall.

The results show good progress toward reaching the achievement target of 85% in 3 years. Attendance records show that outreach to students with poor attendance was particularly effective, as attendance improved immediately for students that advisors talked to and students who improved their attendance were mostly able to succeed and continue or matriculate in the spring.

Fifteen of the 22 students who did not continue or matriculate were identified as being funded by the same foundation. These students were less responsive to advisor outreach - if advisors were able to reach them at all. Targeting specific foundations or organizations that we work with for more collaborative outreach to students could be a useful strategy for improving retention.

Past Improvements:

We implemented outreach for poor attendance in weeks three and five. This was effective for the students. However, there was a challenge getting all faculty to report attendance each week as many are not accustomed to tracking attendance and are not familiar with the reporting system. As a result, not all students of concern were brought to the attention of the advisors. Likewise, midterm grades were useful for identifying students of concern but because this was new, not all faculty provided midterm grades for their students.

Future Improvements

We plan to continue to pursue the objective and achievement target. We will continue with the same interventions as last fall but will work to improve faculty compliance for attendance tracking and midterm grade reporting through more information and training at the start of term and reminders at midterm.

Additionally, we will reach out to the foundation that many of our non-returning students were associated with to determine how best to encourage better attendance and studentship for next fall.

References

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- [2] Sweet Briar College Office of Institutional Effectiveness, "Administrative Assessment Handbook: A Step-by-Step Guide for Assessing Administrative Effectiveness," 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sbc.edu/live/files/16-administrative-effectiveness-assessment-guide>.
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- [4] Emory University, "Administrative Units Assessment," [Online]. Available: <https://provost.emory.edu/planning-administration/assessment/administrative.html>. [Accessed 25 April 2024].
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