Guidelines for
Annual Administrative Assessment

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning

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Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning

Introduction

Overview

Administrative assessment is the systematic process of planning objectives for improvement and gathering, analyzing, and using data to assess progress toward those objectives. At the beginning of the year, a unit sets objectives that will help it better accomplish 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.

Assessment Cycle

Late Summer and Early Fall

Plan objectives, determine assessment measures, and set achievement targets for the coming year.

Fall and Spring Terms

Implement activities, collect data.

Late Spring and Early Summer

Analyze results and report findings, celebrate successes and plan improvements for next year.
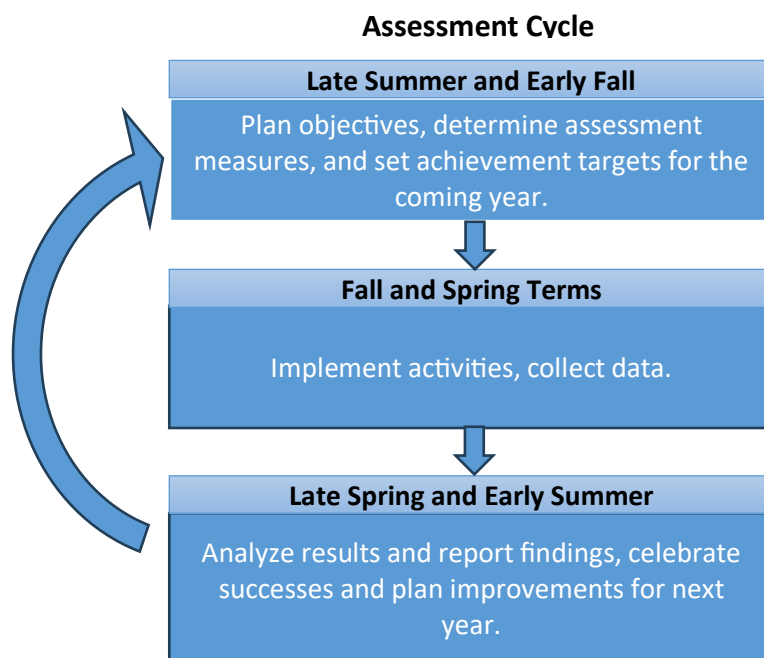
Components of the Assessment Report

The annual assessment report includes the following components:

➢ Mission
➢ Enduring Goals
➢ Objectives
➢ Action Items and Milestones
➢ Achievement Targets
➢ Assessment Measures
➢ Results, Discussion & Analysis
➢ Conclusion
➢ Future Improvements

Each of these components is discussed in detail in this guide. The mission, goals, objectives, action items, achievement targets and assessment measures are part of the assessment planning stage. Units are encouraged to develop these at the beginning of the academic year, in late summer or early fall. Assessment planning helps units determine priorities for

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the coming year as they consider the outcomes that need to be improved and the action items and resources necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.

The results, discussion, and analysis; conclusion; and future improvements are part of the results reporting stage. Units complete these toward the end of the academic year, in the late spring or early summer. The results reporting stage is an opportunity to review the data and reflect on the progress made during the year and the impact of the activities and improvements that were implemented.

Purpose

Administrative Assessment helps units engage effectively in data-based decision making and continuous improvement. Through the process of planning and assessing objectives, units are able to identify and prioritize areas for improvement and then track their progress and success as they achieve their objectives. The regular process of planning and assessing objectives enables a unit to improve its operations and services, allowing it to better contribute to the university's mission and strategic direction.

Additionally, SACSCOC requires that an institution's administrative units regularly engage in assessment activities that improve their administrative effectiveness.

> *SACSCOC Standard 7.3[1]*
> *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 objectives or measures already developed for other reporting purposes can also be used for annual administrative assessment. If the 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.

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[1] SACSCOC. 2024."Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (4th Ed.)" sacscoc.org. pg. 62.

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Timeline
Summer and Early Fall: Planning Stage
Start planning your objectives and assessment measures for the coming year in late summer or early fall. Planned objectives and assessment measures should be finalized and entered into Nuventive before the end of Fall term.

Late Spring and Early Summer: Results 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. Every administrative unit should have a mission statement.

When developing or reviewing your mission statement, it can be helpful to ask yourself:
- What is our unit's purpose? Why do we exist?
- What do we do? (What are our key functions, or what key services do we provide?)
- Who are our primary stakeholders?
- How does the unit support George Mason's mission and strategic direction?

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].

Example Mission Statements: Below are good examples of mission statements developed by George Mason University units. In the first example, we have highlighted and labelled the parts of the mission statement that address each of the questions above.

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[2] Sweet Briar College Office of Institutional Effectiveness. 2022. "Administrative Assessment Handbook: A Step-by-Step Guide for Assessing Administrative Effectiveness." https://www.sbc.edu/live/files/16-administrative-effectiveness-assessment-guide.

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Global Education – George Mason University

The Global Education Office (GEO) facilitates international learning opportunities for Mason faculty and students through a diverse array of study abroad programs that are accessible and engage students in meaningful and life-changing experiences. Through collaboration and innovation, the Global Education Office (GEO) strives to make global learning experiences a reality for all Mason students and faculty.

[Purpose] [Stakeholders] [Key Services] [Connect to strategic direction]

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.

Enduring Goals

Goals can be defined in different ways depending on the context. For the purposes of administrative assessment at George Mason, enduring goals are broad, general statements that describe how your administrative unit fulfills its mission. When you develop enduring goal statements, you are expanding on your mission where you answered the question, 'What do you do?' In essence, you are summarizing your unit's key functions or services in 3-5 statements. (Units typically have 3-5 goals.)

Enduring goal statements are long-term. Once developed, goal statements do <u>not</u> change unless the mission or key functions and services of your unit change. You may choose to edit the statements to fine-tune the wording, but once you are happy with them, the overall substance of the goal statements will rarely change. Because of the long-term and broad, general nature of goals, they are typically <u>not</u> measurable.

The tone of a goal statement is aspirational. Goals describe the services and functions your unit performs as you would ideally like to be able to describe them. For this reason, they often contain positive adjectives or adverbs such as the following:

Effective/ly	*Efficient/ly*	*Accurate/ly*
Seamless/ly	*Successful/ly*	*Timely*

Enduring goals serve as a bridge between your mission and your objectives. They link back to the mission and provide a framework for developing and organizing objectives. Each objective maps to a goal.

Example Enduring Goals: Below are goal statements developed by George Mason's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning. The unit has three enduring goals.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (George Mason University)
   Goals:
   - Partner with institutional stakeholders to develop efficient and effective solutions for data management.

- Support strategic, operational and tactical decision-making through data analytics and research.
- Lead institutional processes aimed at building a culture of assessment and continuous improvement.

Below are some additional example goal statements. These statements have been crafted or sourced 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[3]
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 university'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.

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[3] "Washington College Registrar's Office: Mission, Goals, and Objectives." Webpage accessed July 20, 2024 from https://www.washcoll.edu/people_departments/offices/registrar/mission.php#:~:text=Collect%20and%20distribute%20registration%2C%20enrollment,to%20support%20effective%20College%20operations.

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Tips for Developing Enduring Goals:

In developing goals, you may find it useful to brainstorm answers to the following questions:
    a. What are the key functions or services of your administrative unit?
    b. What does it look like when you perform those key functions or services effectively?

The following prompt can be helpful for framing your goal statements:[4]

       To fulfill this mission, [name of your unit] has [3-5] primary goals, which are to:
          1.
          2.
          3.
          4.
          5.

You may also find it useful to conduct some research. First, check your unit's webpage. How do you describe what your unit does? Then work on summarizing it more succinctly into 3-5 bullet points. You may also find the webpages of similar units at other universities helpful, although it is important to keep in mind that the term 'goals' can be used differently at other colleges or universities.

To ensure that your goal statements are sufficiently long term, ask yourself, "Assuming there are no major changes to our unit's mission, will this goal statement still be valid ten years from now?" The answer should be, "Yes."

Objectives

As with the term 'goals,' the definition of the term 'objectives' can differ depending on the context. For administrative assessment at George Mason, objectives are specific statements describing what the administrative unit wants to achieve to *better* accomplish its goals.

- Objective statements are **specific** and **measurable**.
- They describe the result or outcome you are striving for rather than the smaller tasks or action items that get you there.
- Objectives may or may not change from year to year. (Some objectives become obsolete after a year; others may take multiple years to achieve.)
- Because objectives focus on improving outcomes, the following verbs are commonly used in objective statements: *Improve, Increase, Reduce, Enhance.*
- Each objective should align with a goal.
- Depending on the size and scope of your unit, you may have anywhere between 3 and 9 total objectives.

An objective should have a clear way of measuring success and a precise target that you want to achieve. These are the assessment measures and achievement targets.

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[4] Adapted from "Washington College Registrar's Office: Mission, Goals, and Objectives."

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Example Objective Statements: Below are two example objective statements that align with one of the goals of George Mason's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (OIEP).

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (George Mason University)
    Goal: Lead institutional processes aimed at building a culture of assessment and continuous improvement.
    Objectives:
1. Increase annual assessment report completion rates.
2. Improve the quality of annual assessment report submissions.

Below are some additional example objective statements. These statements have been sourced or 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.

Tips for Developing 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. Some helpful questions to answer as you brainstorm objectives:

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

The objective statement should describe the result you are striving for rather than the tasks or activities to get there. The various activities or projects you plan to undertake to achieve the objective will appear in the "Action Items and Milestones" section.

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

Action Items and Milestones

Under action items and milestones, you can describe the activities, projects, or improvements planned to help you achieve your objective. If the objective will take multiple years to achieve, you may find it useful to organize the activities under major milestones or stages.

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 and can be expressed as a number, percentage, or proportion.
- Achievement targets should be ambitious but achievable. You want to be realistic, but you are also striving to improve.
- Achievement targets should include a deadline or timeframe. Thinking about the time frame helps you set a realistic target and plan out your activities to achieve the target.

Example Achievement Targets:[5] Below are example achievement target statements. Although these statements are all very different, notice that each statement includes a quantitative target and a timeframe for completion.

- 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.
- By June 2026, 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 by 2025.
- 85% of next year's survey respondents will indicate that they are "satisfied" or "highly satisfied" with the support they received.
- In AY 2024-25, 80% of technical service requests will be reviewed and processed within 24 hours of receipt.

Assessment Measures

The assessment measure 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 measure.

Assessment measures 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.

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[5] Adapted from Emory University Office of Planning and Administration. "Guide." Accessed April 25, 2024 from https://provost.emory.edu/planning-administration/assessment/administrative.html.

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Direct Assessment Measures	Indirect Assessment Measures
Institutional Data	Surveys
Performance-Based Assessments	Interviews
Student Work	Focus Groups
Tracking Logs	Course Evaluations
Error Rates	Self-Studies
Processing Time	Reflective Assessments
Audit Reports	
Productivity Reports	
Financial Reports	

When describing the assessment measures, be as specific as possible. You should address the following questions in your description of the assessment measures:
- What will you measure?
- 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 Measures: Below are two example assessment measure descriptions presented together with the objective statement and achievement target for better context. Notice how the description of the assessment measure addresses each of the questions above.

Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program.
- o *Achievement Target:* The current retention rate is 75%. We aim to achieve a retention rate of 85% within the next 3 years.
- o *Assessment Measure*: We will measure fall-to-spring retention rates 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.

Objective: Improve dining options and services for students living on campus.
- o *Achievement Target*: The average rating for survey items about dining options and services will meet or exceed 3.0 on a scale of 1-4.
- o *Assessment Measure:* 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 analyze this year's average ratings for section C.

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

Results, Discussion & Analysis

The Results, Discussion & Analysis section consists of two parts: a results summary statement followed by more in-depth analysis or discussion.

First, state the results of the assessment based on the data you have collected. The results statement should be brief and to the point, and the results should be expressed 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 the total number. This makes it easy to compare your results to your achievement target. The table below shows results statements that align well with their achievement targets.

Achievement Target	Results Statement
1. Enrollment will grow by 2% per year over the next 3 years.	Enrollment last year grew by 1.8%.
2. Average GPAs of student athletes will equal or exceed that of the undergraduate student body.	The average GPA of student athletes was 2.99, the average undergraduate student GPA was 2.91.
3. Alumni donations to the University Foundation will increase by $500,000 over the next four years.	Alumni donations to the University Foundation increased by $150,000 this year on top of the increase of $200,000 last year.

After you state the results, analyze the findings and discuss the results in more detail. Focus on what is most relevant and meaningful for the objective. Depending on your objective, you could:

- Analyze trends you see in the data over time.
- Compare results across subgroups.
- Dig into specific data points.
- Look for associated factors.
- Discuss what activities or improvements worked well and what needs to be further improved.
- Discuss the quality of the data or suitability of the assessment measures.

The focus of the analysis and discussion will vary greatly depending on the objective, however, there should be some kind of analysis and discussion of results for every objective.

An example of a Results, Discussion & Analysis entry is available in the example assessment report at the end of this document.

Conclusion

In the Conclusion field, indicate whether the objective was met, partially met, or not met. If your results statement is clear and aligns with the achievement target, then determining the conclusion should be quite straightforward.

- Met = You've achieved your objective.
- Partially Met = You're making progress but haven't yet achieved the objective.
- Not Met = You haven't made any progress, or there is no data available.

It is normal and 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". If that's the case, use the Results, Discussion & Analysis section to explain any complications that occurred.

Future improvements

Explain whether you plan to continue with the objective and assessment measures next year and why or why not. What action items or improvements do you have planned for next year? Use what you learned from the Results, Discussion & Analysis section to inform your future improvement plans. 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 a Future Improvement entry is available in the example assessment report below.

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

Objective Short Name: Undergraduate Retention
Objective: Increase retention rates for students in the undergraduate pathway program.

Action Items and Milestones:
In the fall term, we will implement early intervention and outreach to students with poor attendance or midterm grades. Advisors will monitor weekly attendance reports and reach out to students of concern in weeks 3 and 5. They will also monitor midterm grades and reach out to students of concern in week 8.

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

Assessment Measure: We will measure fall-to-spring retention rates 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.

Individual Responsible for Assessment: John Doe

RESULTS REPORTING STAGE
Results Discussion & Analysis:
The retention rate for last fall's cohort (the first year for this objective) was 80%. This is an improvement of 5% compared to the previous year and shows good progress toward reaching the achievement target of 85% in 3 years.

Advisor outreach to students of concern was effective as attendance improved immediately following advisor outreach, and most students who improved their attendance were retained. 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.

Fifteen of the 22 students who did not continue or matriculate were identified as being funded by the same foundation. Targeting specific foundations or organizations that we work with for more collaborative outreach to students could also be a useful strategy for improving retention.

Conclusion: Partially Met

Future Improvements:
We plan to continue 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.

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